BAMBOO COMICS WIN SELECTION

姫のためなら死ねる

kimino tamenara shineru

2

presented by くずしろ

TAKE SHOBO

BAMBOO COMICS
WIN SELECTION
TAKE SHOBO

姫(きみ)の ためなら 死ねる 2

for you, my lady,
I would lay down
my life

kimino
tamenara
shineru

くずしろ
KUZUSHIRO

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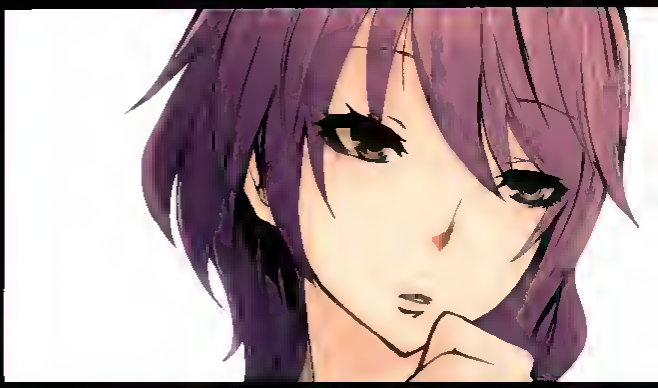
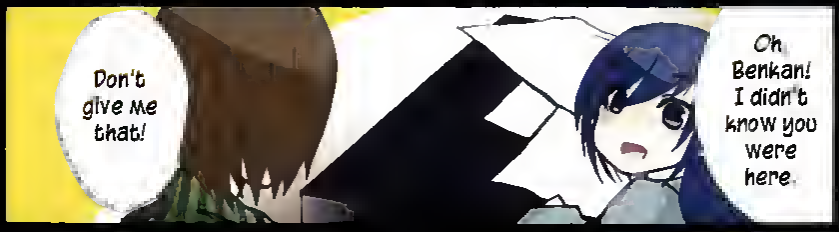
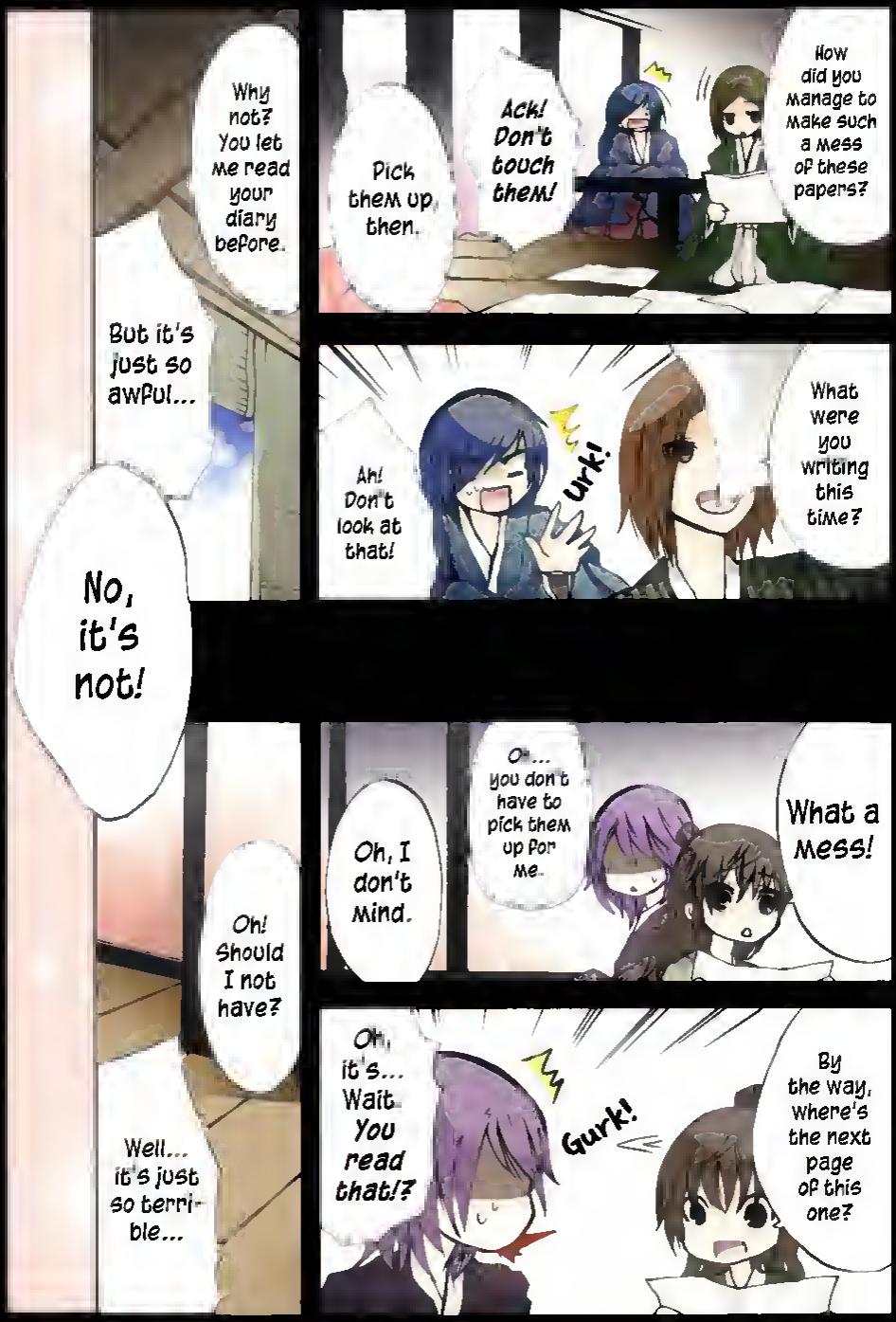
chapter 12.5





My friend and I have a peculiar relationship. She's like a mother or an older sister to me.


How did you manage to make such a mess of these papers?
Ack! Don't touch them!
Pick them up then.
What were you writing this time?
Urk!
Ah! Don't look at that!
What a mess!
Oh... you don't have to pick them up for me.
Oh, I don't mind.
By the way, where's the next page of this one?
Oh, it's... Wait You read that!?
Gurk!
Why not? You let me read your diary before.
But it's just so awful...
No, it's not!
Oh! Should I not have?
Well... it's just so terrible...

I like it.
Your mind is such an interesting place.

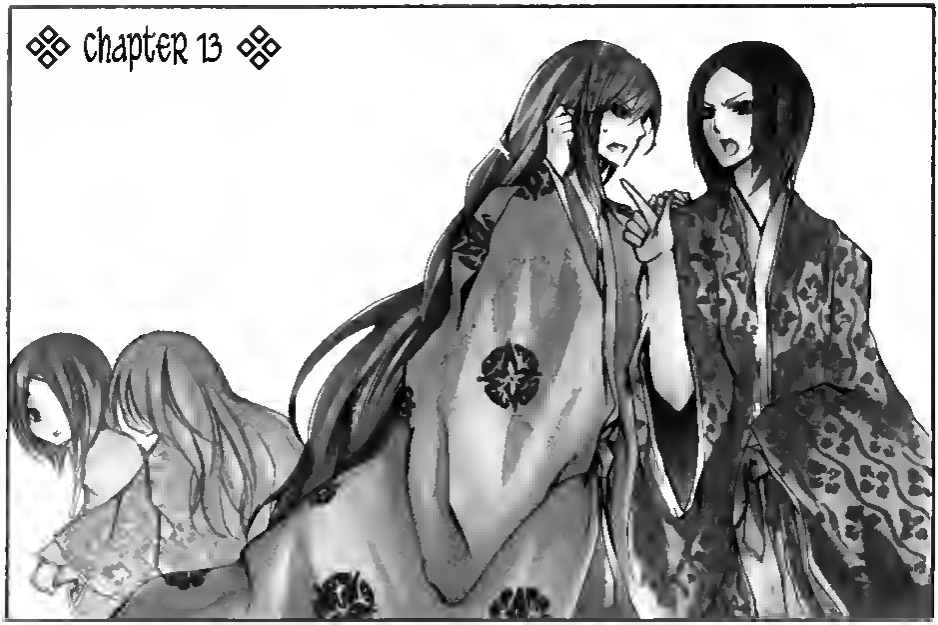
* See sections 144 and 145 of The Pillow Book for details
pat pat
Because you're like a child yourself.
Wha—
But you're only 3 years older than me!
That part?!
That's so you.
Contradicting yourself like that.
Right after the bit about how all tiny things are endearing, you write about how small children can be a nuisance. *
Why are you looking at me when you say that?
Not that I disagree. Small children are a bother.
Spending time with her is my favorite thing to do.
Wh-what do they have to do with it!?
That goes for these too.
You're too modest!
...I-I'm not that interesting.
.....
You have a gift. You shouldn't turn your back on it and let it go to waste.

...She'll

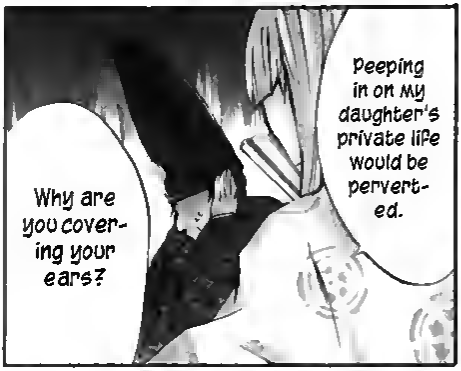
even if she gives her heart to another, will she?
never abandon me
even if she gives her heart to another. Right?
never abandon me

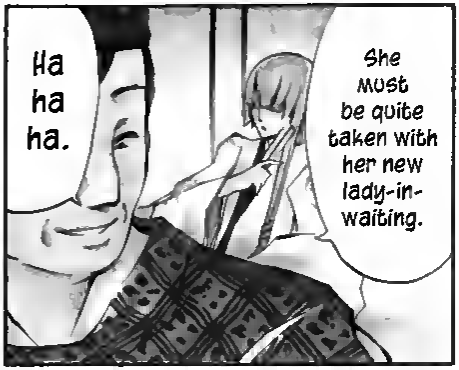
She'll be with me until I draw my last breath.

chapter 13



he didn't even realize he was doing it

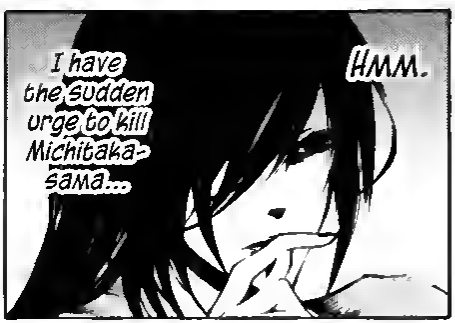




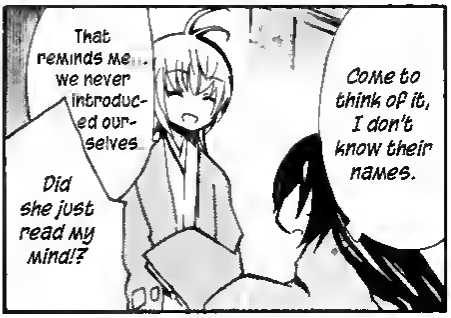
no longer interesting
she's already taken care of her father-in-law
So may I make a copy of it?
A copy? But it's in my room at the moment ...
Shona-gon.
Yes, Your Majesty?
Don't worry. With a book like that...
reading it once is enough to inscribe it in my memory.
Huh ?!
That diary you showed us before ...
There's someone I'd like to share it with.
tap
It's all right up here...
Um... it's my mother.
Her Mother ...
You look like you're having fun.
So a part of me is in-... inside...
So the time has finally come
to face my moth-er-in-law!!

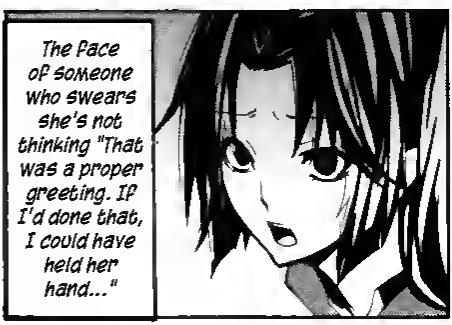
hey! that's not fair!

She's amazing. She's like a grown-up version of Her Majesty, with the same cheer and refinement.
By the way, what is Her Majesty's mother like?



too Late

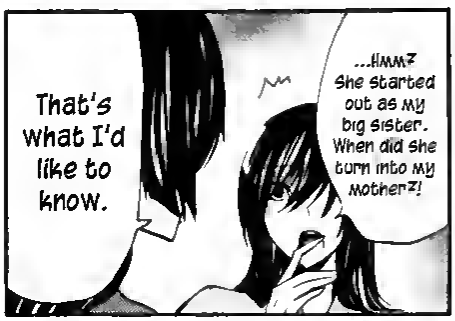




Well, I don't know anything about her.
Her Majesty was asking about your REAL mother!
Huh?!

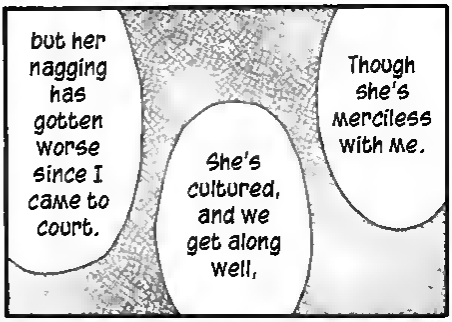
A friend of hers was concerned about me, so she visited all the time.
She passed away when I was young. I have no memories of her.

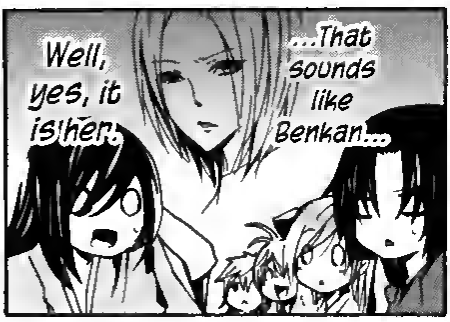
That was how we met.
Shonagon, think of her as your real sister. Play nice with her.


That's what I'd like to know.
...Hmm? She started out as my big sister. When did she turn into my mother?!

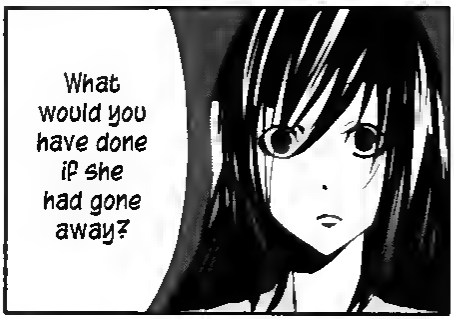
What is your mother like, Shonagon?
Hmm?

My mother...
Well... she's fairly easy-going, I suppose...

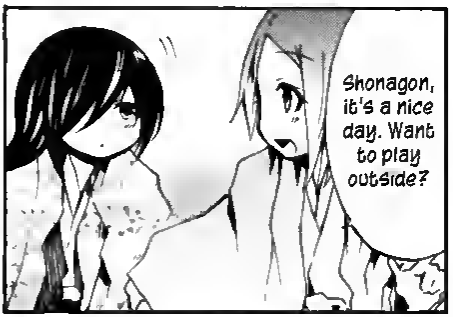

Though she's merciless with me.
She's cultured, and we get along well,
but her nagging has gotten worse since I came to court.

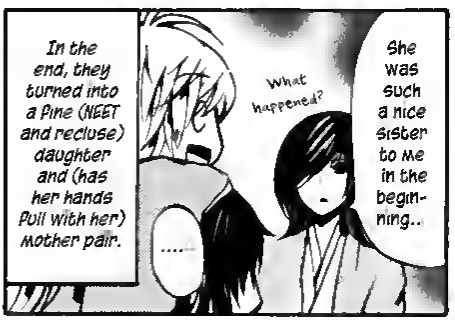

...That sounds like Benkan...
Well, yes, it is her.

the end of the world



the process



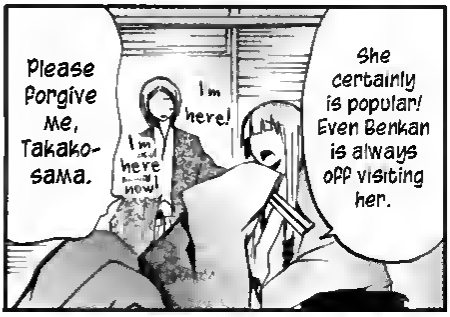

In the end, they turned into a Pine (NEET and recluse) daughter and (has her hands full with her) Mother pair.
What happened?
.....
She was such a nice sister to me in the beginning...

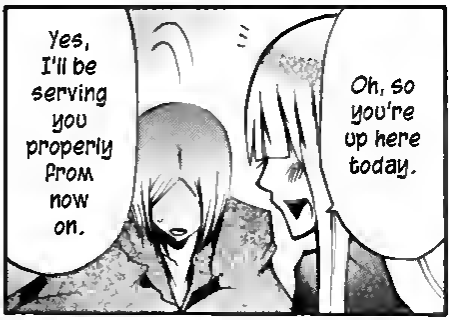
Haha... you're right.
It's frightening that you would cling so tightly to one friend.
that Benkan could leave me.
I never even considered the possibility
That's made my fear of strangers even worse. I tend to avoid other people... I generally see them as my enemies.
It's embarrassing to admit this, but Benkan is my only friend.
How self-centered I've been!
There's no reason she should stay with me forever.
I... was speechless...
So when you told me that you didn't hate me,
that she would always be here by my side.
I just assumed
Why would I be!? Are you a fool?
Oh, what's wrong, Kou? You're bright red.
Are you in love?
But you haven't lost her yet...
...They say you don't appreciate what you have until you lose it, but I never realized how painful it would be.

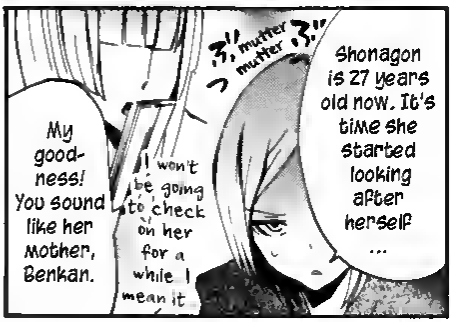
so she can catch up
never going to happen
Shonagon says that I'm precious to her,
but Benkan must be dear to her in a special way...
So Benkan is like family to you, Shonagon.
Shona-gon... How long have you known Benkan?
Um, around 25 years now...
I was three when we met, and we've been together ever since.
She must feel the same way about you...
I envy you, that you have such a person in your life.
.....
You should cherish her.
...I will!
...You'll have to live a long life, Shonagon.
Hmm...? Ah... okay.
So, Benkan is like my mother. That means she'll be her Majesty's mother-in-law someday.
I...
I'll hold her dear!!

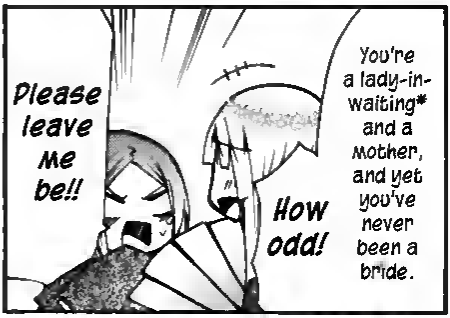
Intentions and Responsibility

Oddities of Japanese

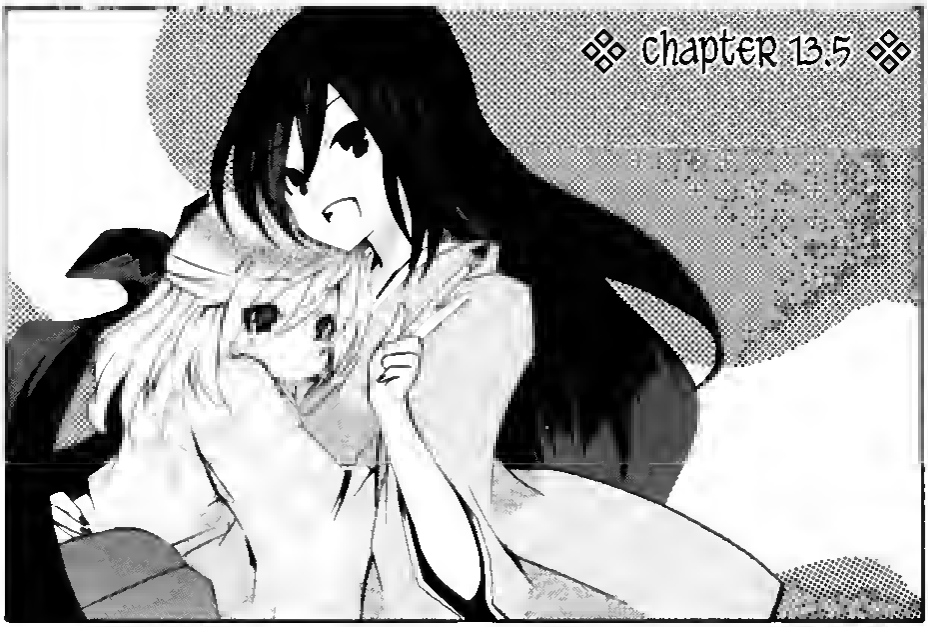




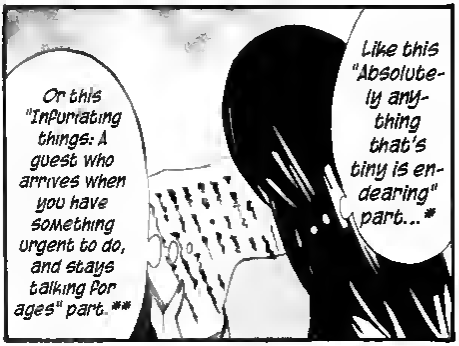

My goodness! You sound like her mother, Benkan.
mutter mutter
I won't be going to check on her for a while I mean it
Shonagon is 27 years old now. It's time she started looking after herself ...

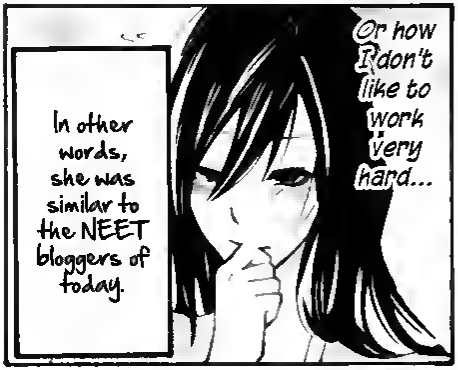


* The Japanese word she uses, "nyoubou" can also mean "wife."



What Sei Shonagon was really like, basically


Like this "Absolutely anything that's tiny is endearing" part...*
Or this "Infuriating things: A guest who arrives when you have something urgent to do, and stays talking for ages" part.**

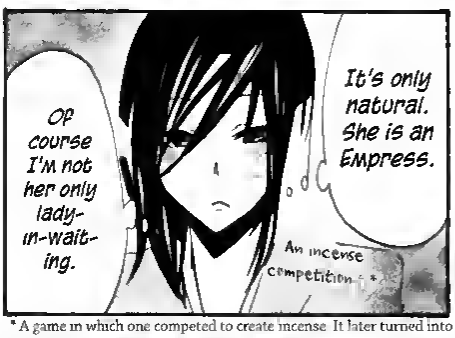


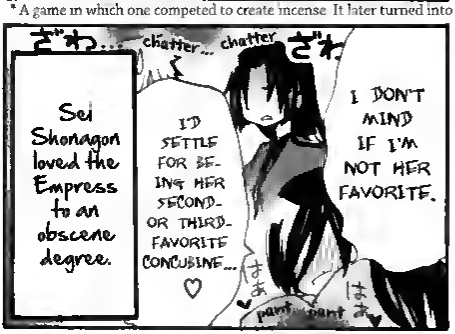
but I bet people will be able to connect with it even a thousand years from now.
This diary is about my personal impressions,

* Quoted from the 144th section of ***The Pillow Book***. In this strip, Kuzushiro gives the reading "little girls" to the expression for "tiny," giving the phrase an additional meaning: "All little girls are endearing."

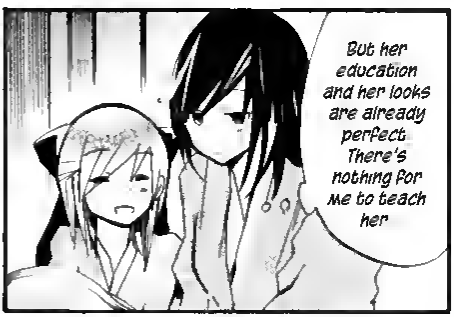
** Quoted from the 25th section of ***The Pillow Book***

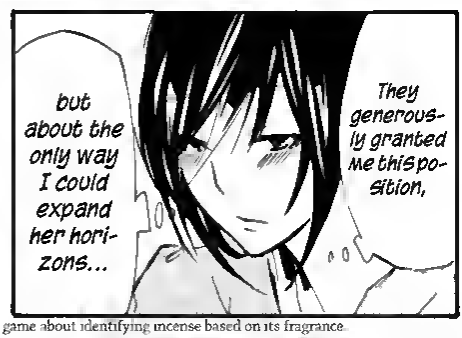
that's not what "Lady-in-waiting" means



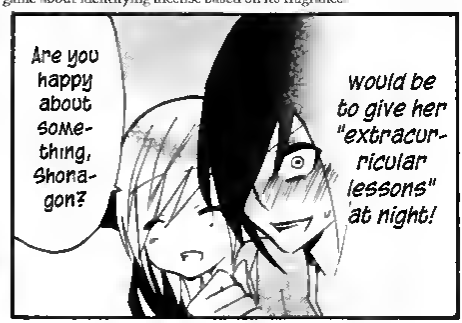

Sei Shonagon loved the Empress to an obscene degree.
chatter... chatter
I'D SETTLE FOR BEING HER SECOND- OR THIRD-FAVORITE CONCUBINE... ♡
I DON'T MIND IF I'M NOT HER FAVORITE.
pant... pant

the palace is peaceful





* A game in which one competed to create incense. It later turned into a game about identifying incense based on its fragrance.

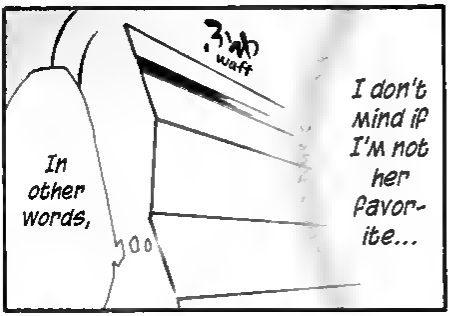


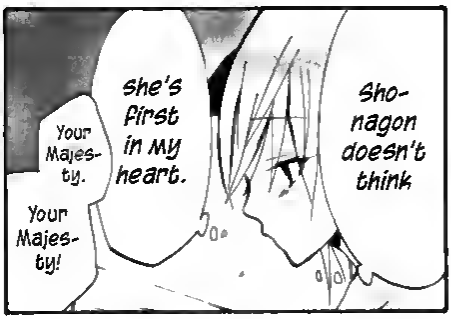
She reported her
Straight from the source
!
Yank
Excuse me! You shouldn't be so clingy with Her Majesty!
Oh! Yes, Your Majesty.
Come join me, Shonagon.
I-I'm well aware of that.
You said you wouldn't mind being her second- or third-favorite! You should remember your place!
Sniff...
This is a nice fragrance, don't you think?
I intend to monopolize her for a moment every chance I get!
And that's exactly why
Sniff
But it smells much sweeter and gentler.....
Oh... is this jijuu incense?*
Somebody call the police!
Sniff
Oh!
Like right now, for instance!
...The incense ...
Sniff
Like Her Majesty ...
Pardon?
Sniff

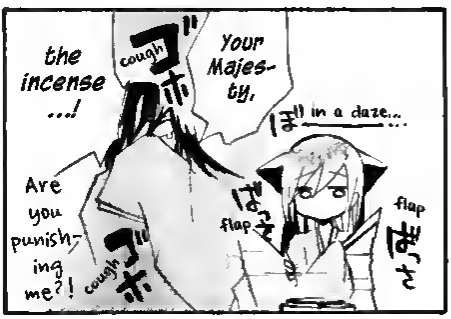
* One of the six principal themes of incense at the time

In section 96 of ***The Pillow Book*** Shonagon says that she would insist on being first in someone's heart, then when the Empress asks about it, replies that "Of the nine paths to Paradise, I would happily take even the lowest" (meaning that she wouldn't mind being the lowest rank as long as she was allowed to be around the Empress). The Empress protests, saying "You should wish to be loved first by the one whom you hold first in your own heart." Shonagon finds that response delightful.

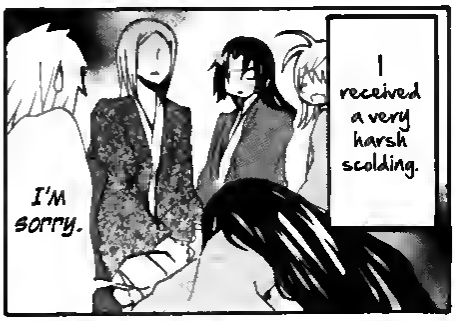
unconsciously

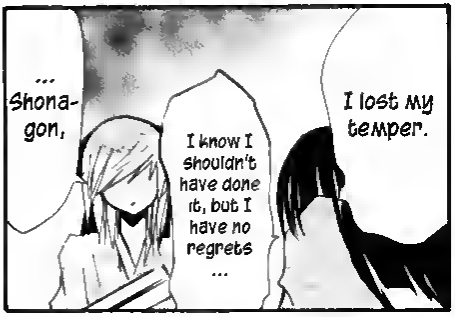


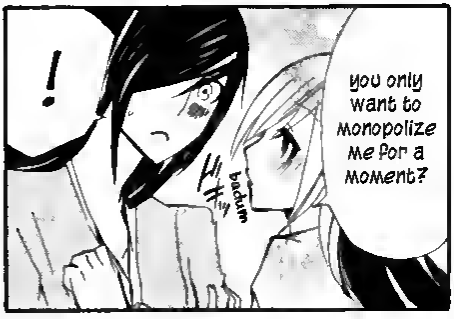




she knows her place







F-for a lady-in-waiting such as myself, the absolute lowest of the low, even a mere moment with you is more than enough.
glare
Well, I'd like to monopolize her every hour of every day, but ...

She has no idea it will be exposed a thousand years from now
What am I supposed to do about this?!
Conk
Get a room
Your Majesty... is something amiss?
cough
Um,
.....
Ah! What should I have said?
Her Majesty was subtly inviting my affections today...
If I... said that you weren't ...
I'm thinking about whether you're first in my heart, Shonagon.
I'll write about it now, while it's fresh in my memory.
rustle
rustle
She's so adorable. Life is a torment ...
Do...? ...! D-does that mean...
what would you do?
This was how The Pillow Book was composed.
If only the other ladies-in-waiting weren't here
Ah! I wish the two of us could be secluded in our own little world...
Looks like they're getting mushy.
What are they doing now?

a plot I shelved because I couldn't come up with the execution or punchline and because it was too much of a pain.

chapter 14
How did this happen?

...I...
don't think I can take it...
3" quiver...
3...

Are you all right, Shonagon...?
Mm...

Shonagon caught a cold.
But... if you're going to be sick, you should do it in here!
AUUUGH! TAKE IT AWAY. TAKE IT AWAY!

a treatable illness

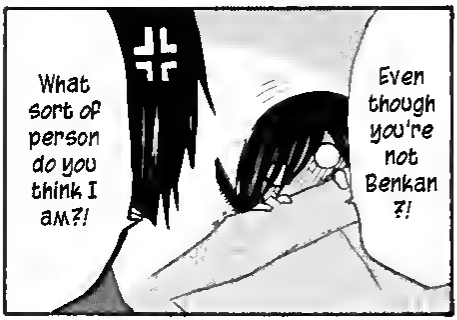
that morning

She didn't even have time to enjoy it
to ask for her daughter's hand
Mmmm ...
Don't be silly. You need to lie down.
Yes.
So today is our day off?
H... Hold on, Shonagon!
slump...
Her Majesty is in the North court
visiting her mother, Takako-sama.
.....
She's visiting...
her mother ...
slip...
YOU'RE HEAVY...
Why?
stagger...
I should accompany her, then.

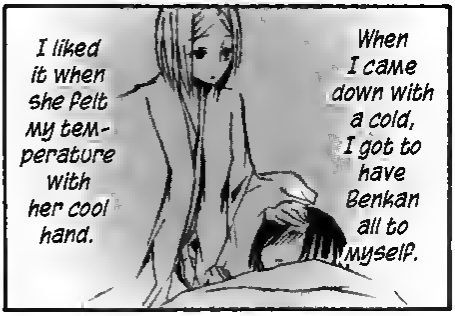
Kou Shiki-bu...
Oh,
you still have a bit of a fever.

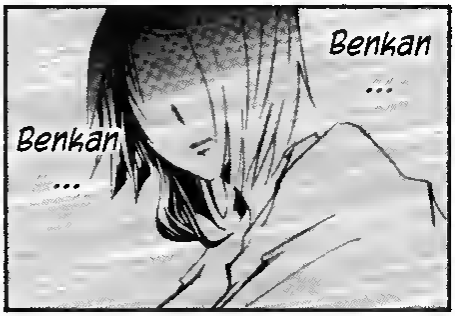
It's dark... Is it night?
Um...

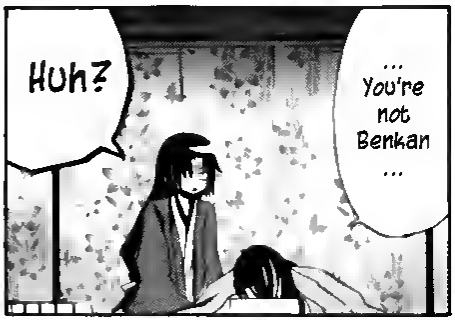
have you been caring for me all day?
Hmm?
Of course!


Even though you're not Benkan?!
What sort of person do you think I am?!

Colds are bother-some,
but I don't mind them so much.


When I came down with a cold, I got to have Benkan all to myself.
I liked it when she felt my tem-perature with her cool hand.


Benkan ...
Benkan ...

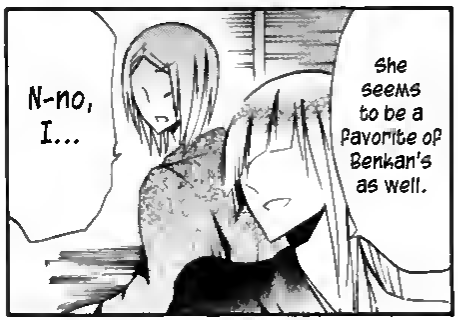

... You're not Benkan ...
Huh?

and so...
Augh. This is embarrassing.
She could at least put the light out.
...Are you all right?
Hngh!
Ah...
Yes.
But... Wait—
You don't really want me to stop, do you?
Ah! No, not there ...
What are you thinking about?
Hey,
That would be embarrassing, too.
certainly not
You need to wipe it off and change your clothes.
I'm so sweaty... It's disgusting.
Don't be a fool! You'll only make it worse.
Nah. Too much trouble.
Take your clothes off.
...I'll do it for you.
Are you sure you're still sick? You must be doing better if you can say such things.
I don't want to put myself in danger ...

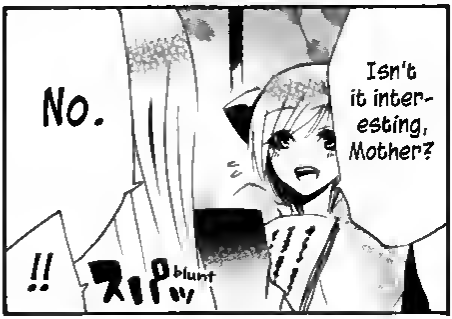
she snaps far too easily
a sudden spike
!
shiver...
Urgh... I'm a bit chilly.
slip
I've been in bed all day. I'm not sleepy...
I hear counting something can help you fall asleep.
...Kou Shikibu... This is yours.
You can borrow it. I don't mind.
Just for today
But what should I count? What would be soothing...? ..... Oh...
Count-ing...?
Argh!
Hmmm? But what if you catch a cold?
I'm not cold. I'll be fine without it.
How will you sleep now?
Four Em-presses. Five...!!
One Empress. Two Em-presses. Three Em-presses.
part
はあ
Ex-cuse me?!
I'll just sleep with you, then!
Don't worry. This is a good fever.
Oh, no! Has your fever gone up?

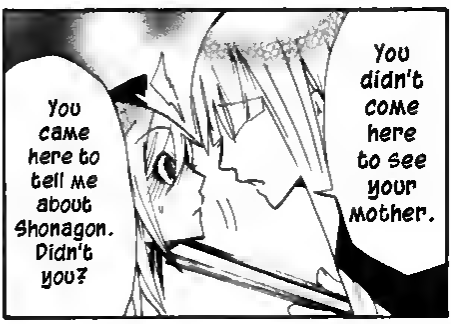
yes, yes
this could start an infinite loop
Kou Shiki-bu?
Oh... I never thanked her.
No, you'll catch my cold...
You don't want to?!
We shouldn't do this!
.....
... Maybe she's asleep.
If I catch your cold,
I've already been near you all day.
Thank you.
you'll just have to take care of me.
She was wide awake.
.....
I'll thank her again when she wakes up.
Quiet! Just go to sleep!
I don't think that really solves anything, though...

after that...

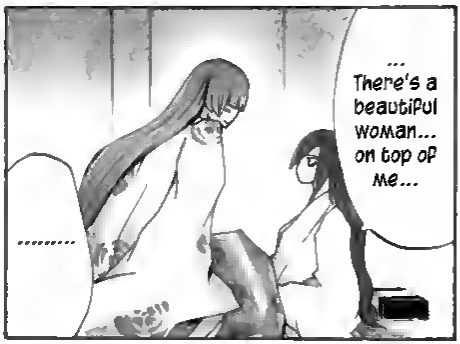


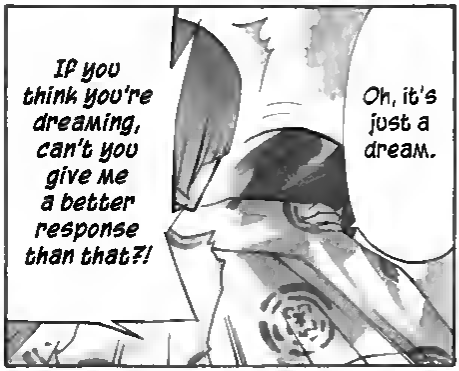
an easy mark

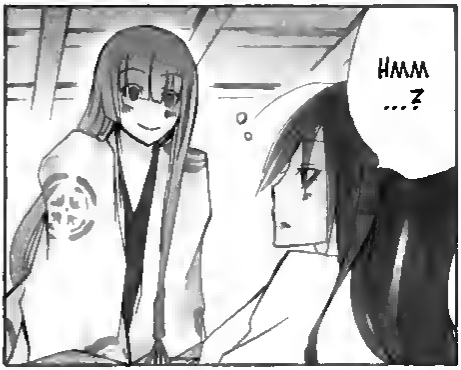




you could have all the sex you want!

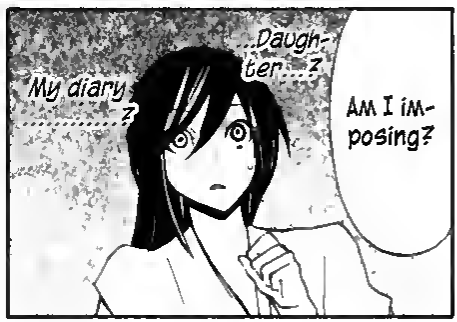


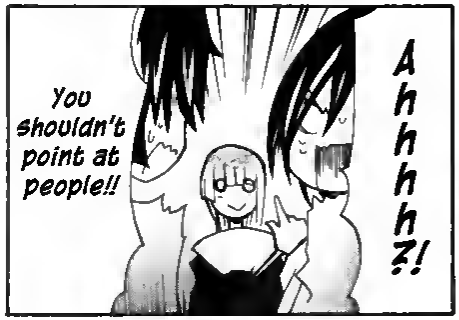




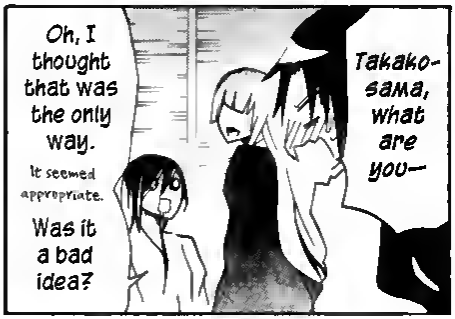
waking her up
dumbfounded
Eheheh. I thought I'd drop in! ♡
T-T-T-T-Takako-sama, why...
Mm...
Is something wrong, Shonago-...
.....
.....
Oh! You're finally awake?
Yaaawn. What's going on..?
tap tap
Shonagon!
You're still half-asleep ...
.....
The same dream?
beam
Oh, good morning, Kou Shikibu.
How about this?
smack
Shonagon!

this is her?



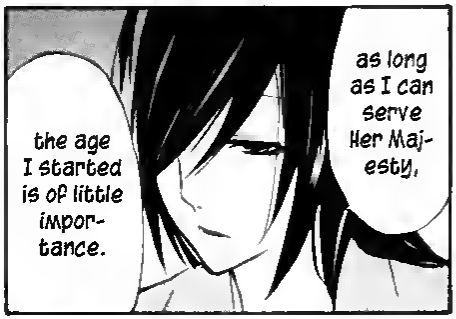


a real comedian



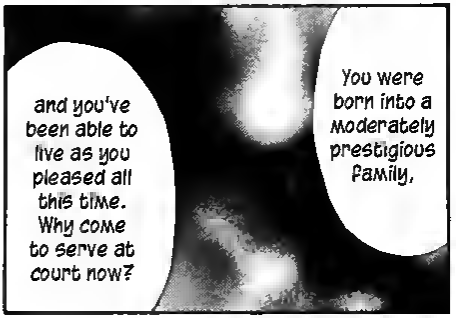
If she were to talk about herself now
What she's like
She keeps moving in so close.
But I was just so anxious
Mornings aren't the time to have a proper chat, are they?
Takako-sama, if you wished to meet Shonagon,
Th-this is Her Majesty's Mother ?!
to learn more about you...
Hmm... Indeed.
couldn't you have come while she was tutoring your daughter?
But... in that case...
About me...?
So what else could I do, hmm?
But I wished to visit her this morning.
Let's not talk about her right now.
Is that all right?
Ninety percent of it will be about your daughter.
This is what she's like...
...This is what she's like?

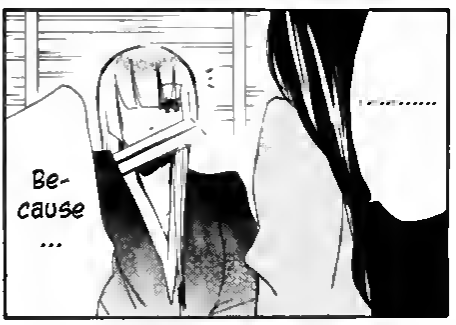
conflicted

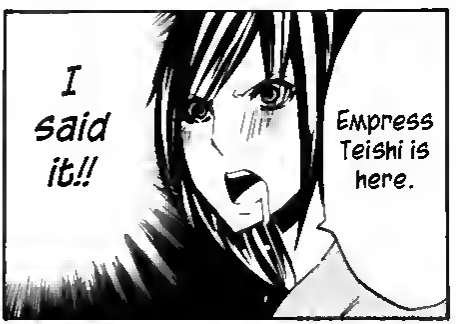


I'd like a 5-year-old version of her, too!! Oh, but her current age really is the best...
I do rather regret not meeting her sooner, though.

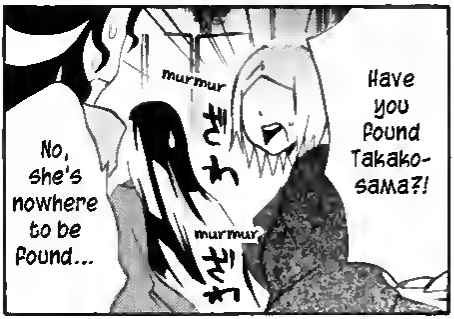
It's the truth, but not quite what she asked

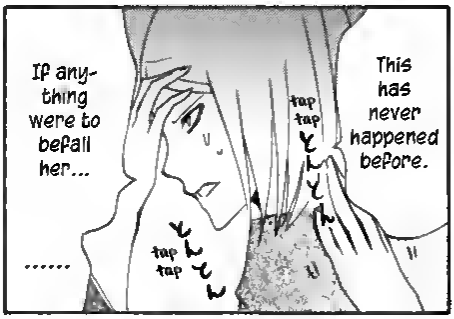

and you've been able to live as you pleased all this time. Why come to serve at court now?
You were born into a moderately prestigious family,



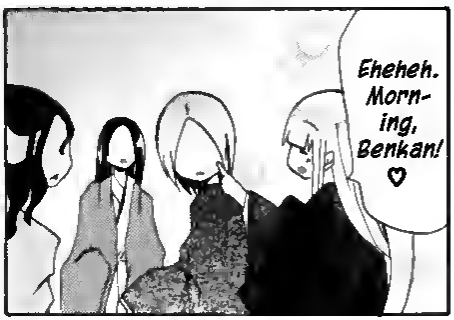


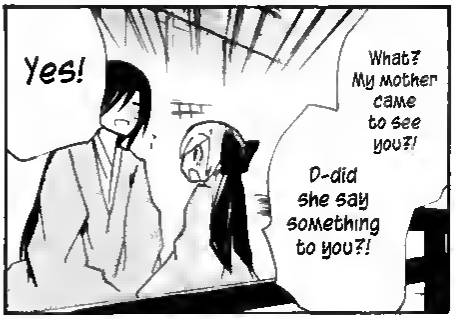
She looks like she's enjoying herself
It would make for a bad manga, too
What?! And how are you going to get out from here...
Well, I'd better be going.
I'm already in for a scolding from Benkan.
Hmm...
She followed my advice, I see.
Please look after Teishi for me,
Shonagon.
You must be a truly beautiful person,
Sei Shonagon.
T-Takako-sama!
Please don't climb up that!
Look... after her ...?
...?
Th-thank you...
OMG!
kaboom
I have her official approval!
Oh. What a pity.
pry
You can't repeat the same joke.


murmur
murmur
Have you found Takako-sama?!
No, she's nowhere to be found...


tap tap
tap tap
This has never happened before.
If anything were to befall her...
.....

What—
poke


Eheheh. Morn-ing, Benkan! ♡

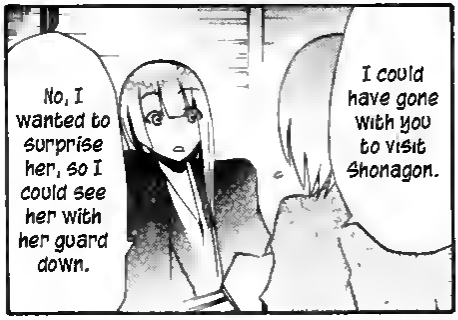

Yes!
What? My mother came to see you?!
D-did she say something to you?!

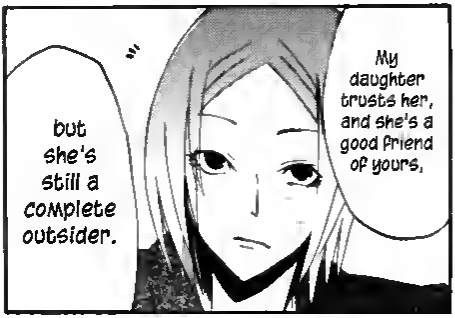
She asked me to look after you for her.
.....!

Oh, I see...

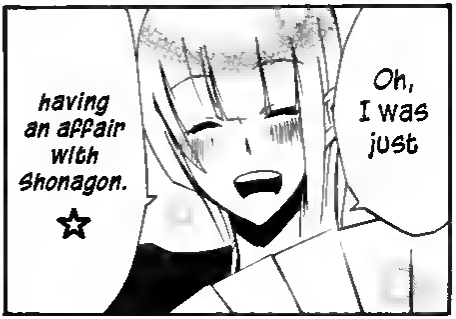
Hmm, will Her Majesty be that aggressive when she grows up?
Uh-oh. I don't know if I'll be able to with-stand that...
?

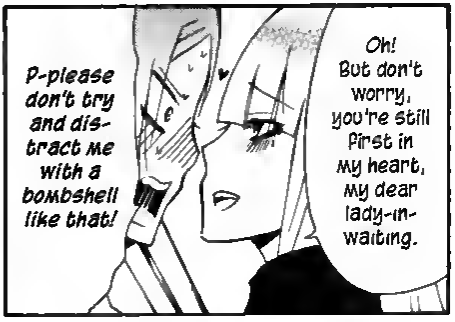
ambiguous

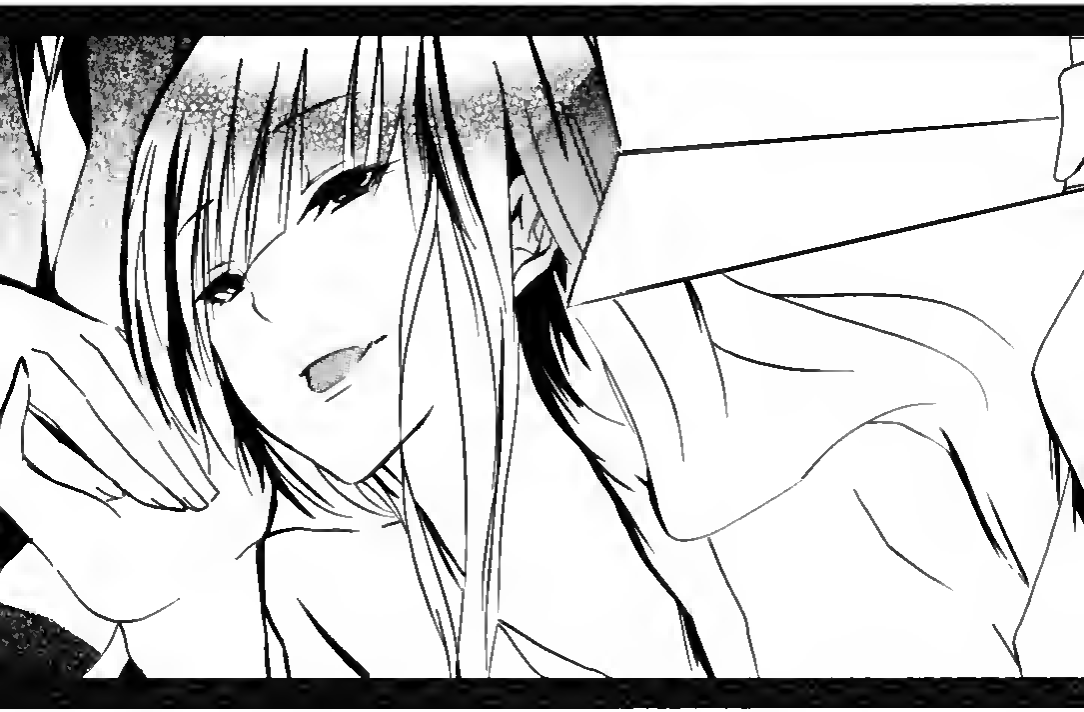




hang in there




Oh! But don't worry, you're still first in my heart, my dear lady-in-waiting.
P-please don't try and distract me with a bombshell like that!



◆ fujiwara no takako ◆

She's around 30 in this manga.
She and Benkan are about the same age.

I figured I'd make her... someone who's surprisingly shrewd, despite all her teasing, and she has the playfulness I failed to incorporate into Teishi's character.

Incidentally, before I introduced her,
I was beset by an impulse to include a character with straight bangs (because I like them). So she ended up being the character who fit best with my own preferences, inside and out. If you like her too, come shake my hand!
Aren't straight bangs great?

Shirogane Kosakon

Nobody ever remembers her name.

She makes the witty comebacks when Benkan isn't around, points out Kou's flaws, and so on and so forth. She's turned out to be surprisingly helpful for me, the author. It's a shame about her name.

...Well, whatever.

Sui Chuunagon

Nobody ever remembers her name either.

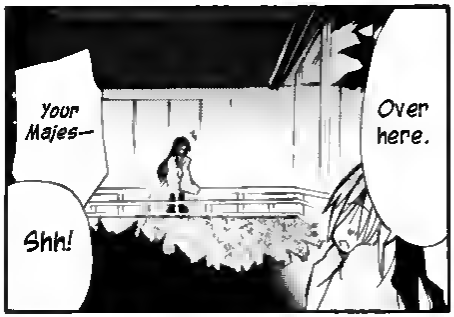
Her witty comebacks might be deliberate, or maybe she just completely ignores the vibes everyone else is giving off.

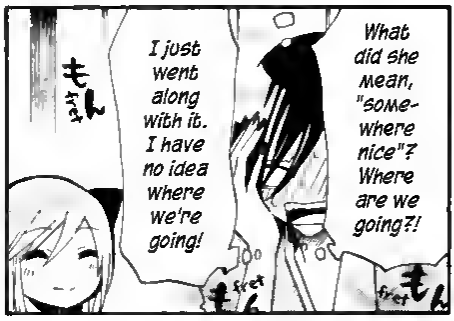
I don't want the people at court to just be a bunch of weirdos, so I think she's an important character. It's a shame about her name.

...Well, whatever.

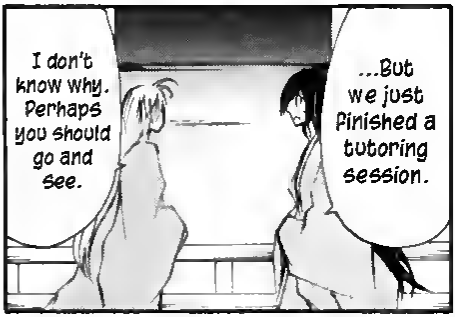
...Yes ...
Oh? Why? Because it's been so long?
creak...
Are you nervous, Shona-gon?
creak
HMM?
This is our first... Our first.....
...So long? The truth is, it's my first time...
creak
Her Majesty and I are going on an outing together.
honey-moon!
pant pant
creak
creak
creak
chapter 16

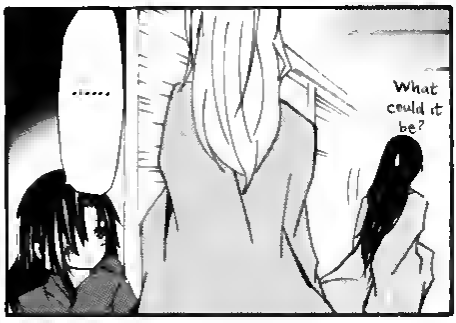
Like heaven?





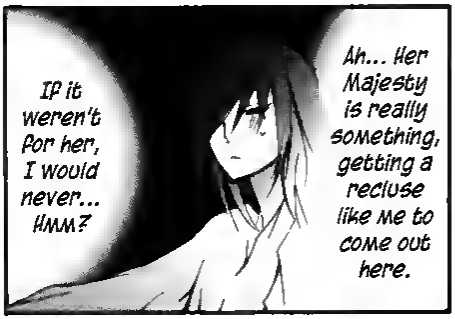
a bit prior

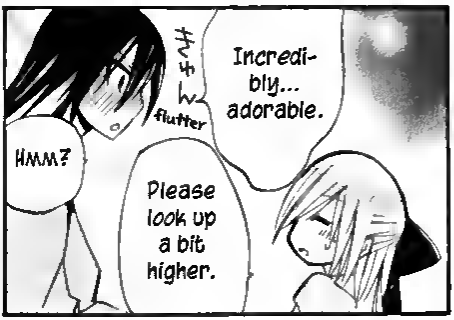




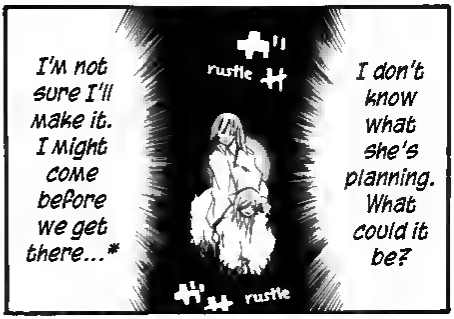
the end is always sudden
the same as always, yet different
clatter
clatter
We've hit a rough patch in the road...
Are you all right?!
It's been a long time since I've gone out on personal business...
I think the last time was when I went to a sermon with
Shonagon,
Where in the world are we going?
D-don't look yet!
could you...
not talk about her right now?
clasp
Can you hold out just a little longer?
Please ...?
Your Majesty... do you mean...
The end of my life!
Yes.
What's with this major development? The final chapter must be near...
Your Majesty?!
Eek !!
crash

I only have eyes for you





Where are we headed?

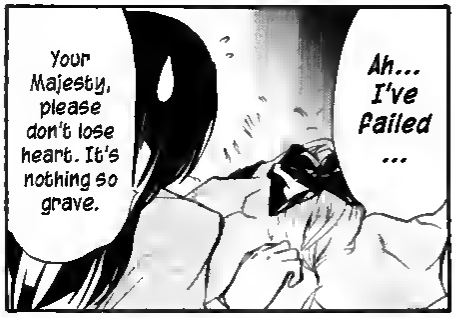


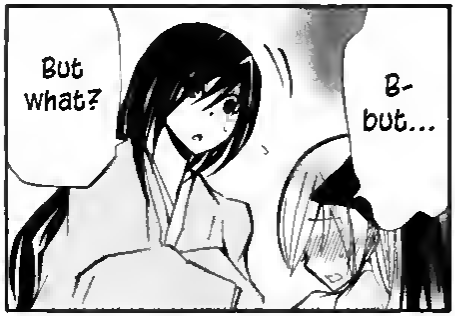
* The original play on words hinges on the expression "to go" ("iku") which can also mean "to have an orgasm" and is a homophone for "to pass away"

I consider myself an apt scholar.
I read books.
I write in my diary every day.
How embarrassing.
Aren't they beautiful? I wanted to show them to you.
... Cherry blossoms?
But at times like this, I can't find the words
or rhythm
They're beautiful...
to properly express my feelings.
?
And it's embarrassing that I had such inflated expectations

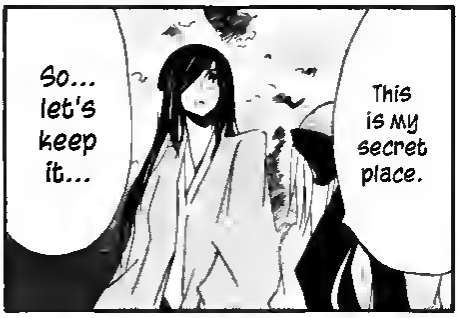
* The original title is a play on words "ureshi" written as "happy"/"joy" plus "death" ("shi") rather than "happy" (in kanji) plus "shi" in hiragana

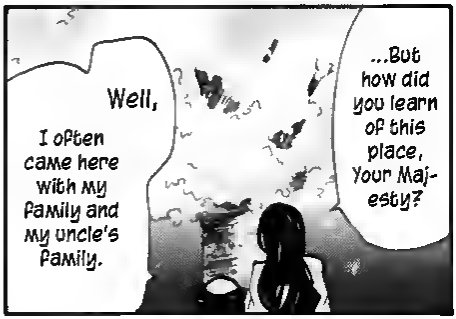
Dying happy *

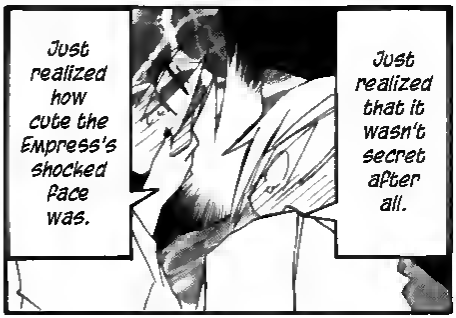




Reactions

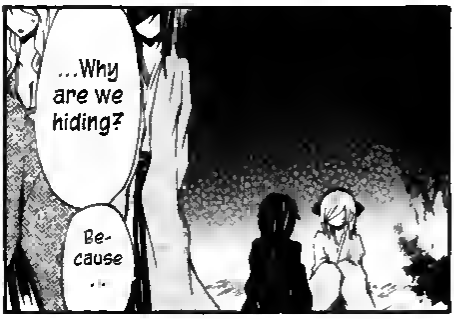


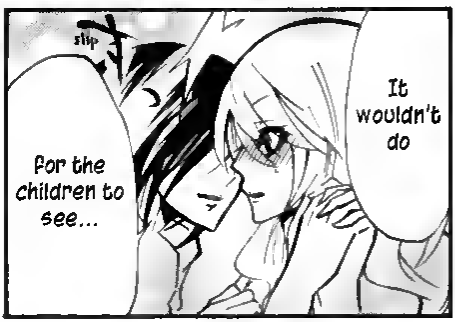


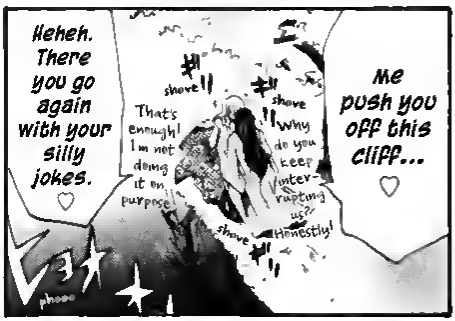


* "Gake no Ue no Nyoubou," a takeoff on the Studio Ghibli movie title ***Gake no Ue no Ponyo*** (known as ***Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea*** or simply ***Ponyo***).

Ladies-in-waiting on a cliff *

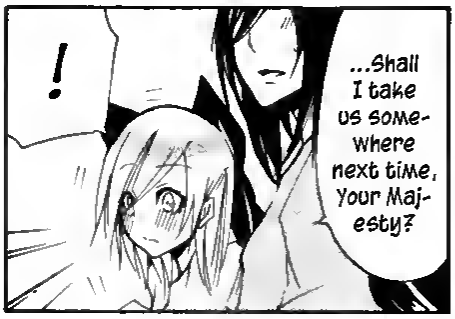





Heheh. There you go again with your silly jokes. ♡
shove
That's enough! I'm not doing it on purpose
shove
Why do you keep interrupting us?
shove
Honestly!
Me push you off this cliff... ♡
phooo

not even that

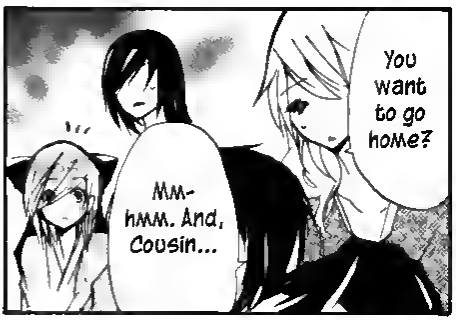
...Yes...
...This ended up being rather ordinary after all, didn't it?

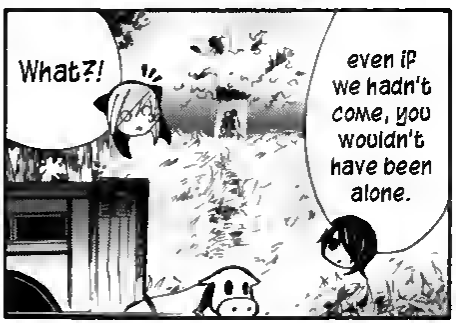

!
...Shall I take us somewhere next time, Your Majesty?

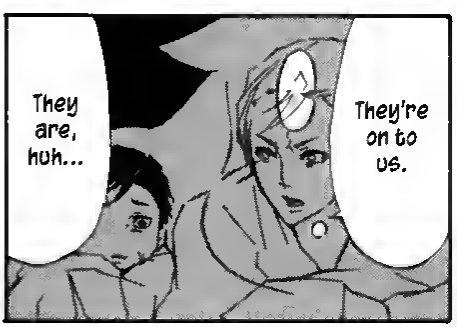
Not at all.
...And this promise
Y-you wouldn't mind?

will be
our special secret.

Hmm?
What are you doing?
Murasaki, it's time we left.


Mm-hmm. And, Cousin...
You want to go home?

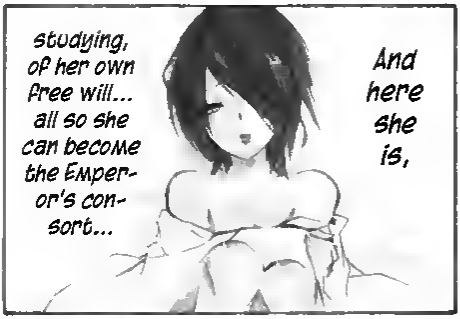

What?!
even if we hadn't come, you wouldn't have been alone.

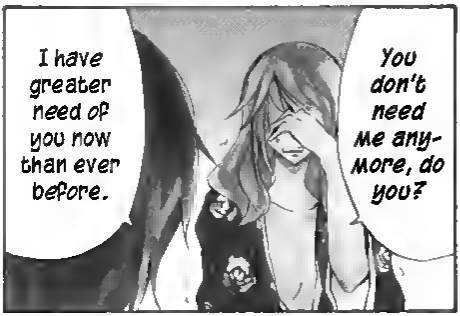

They are, huh...
They're on to us.

* The back of the 2,000-yen bill has a portrait of Murasaki Shikibu and an illustration of a scene from ***The Tale of Genji***
The front has a picture of the Shureimon, a famous gate in Okinawa

But you're not yourself

Jumping to conclusions

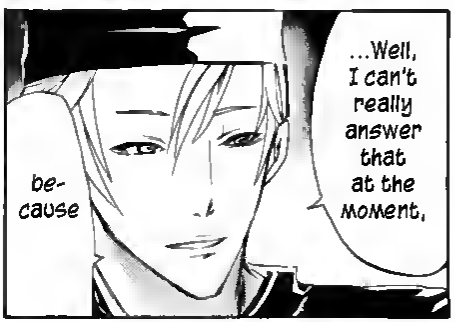




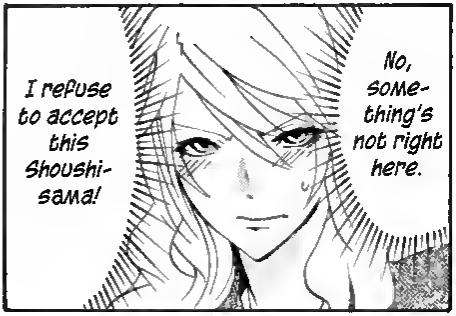
It can't be!

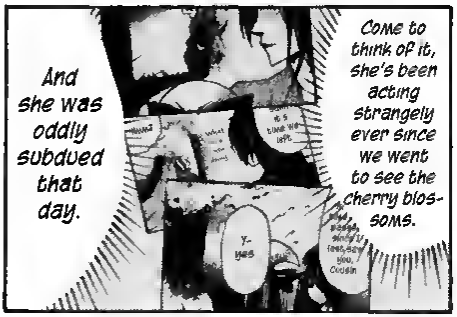
Laissez-faire

Is Shoushi-sama only following your wishes, or does she truly desire to become a royal con-sort?
I'd like to ask you a ques-tion, if I may.

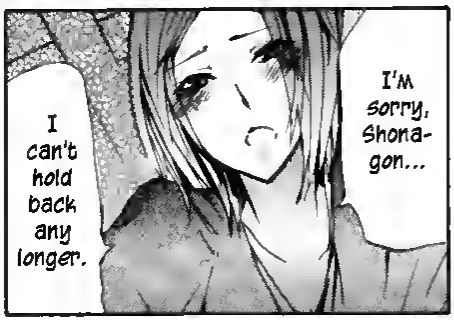


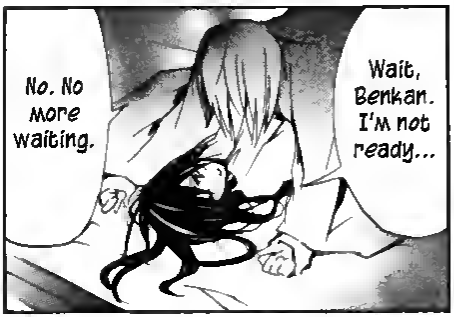
an occupational hazard (abbreviated)

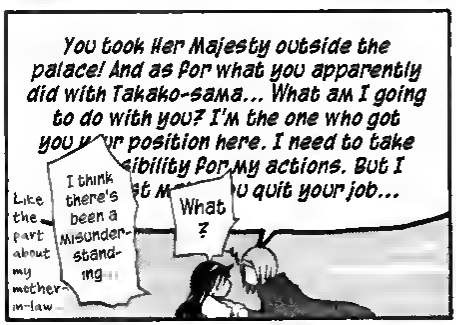


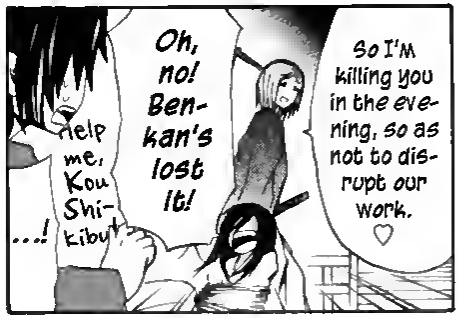

And she was oddly subdued that day.
Come to think of it, she's been acting strangely ever since we went to see the cherry blos-soms.

a special punishment

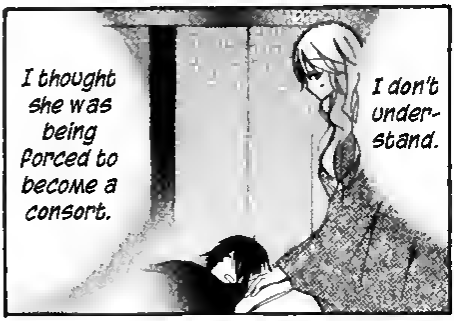


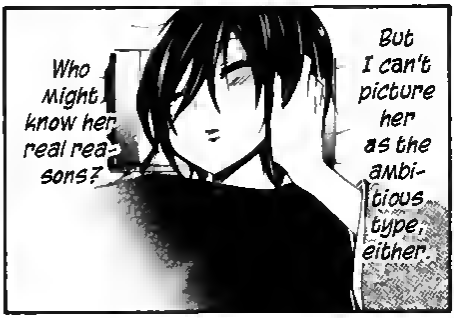


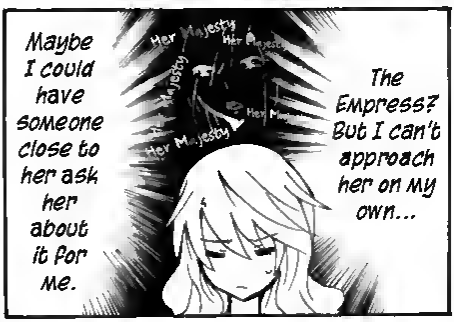

You took Her Majesty outside the palace! And as for what you apparently did with Takako-sama... What am I going to do with you? I'm the one who got you your position here. I need to take responsibility for my actions. But I
I think there's been a misunderstanding...
What?
Like the part about my mother-in-law...

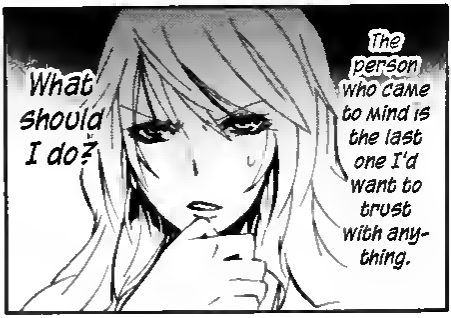


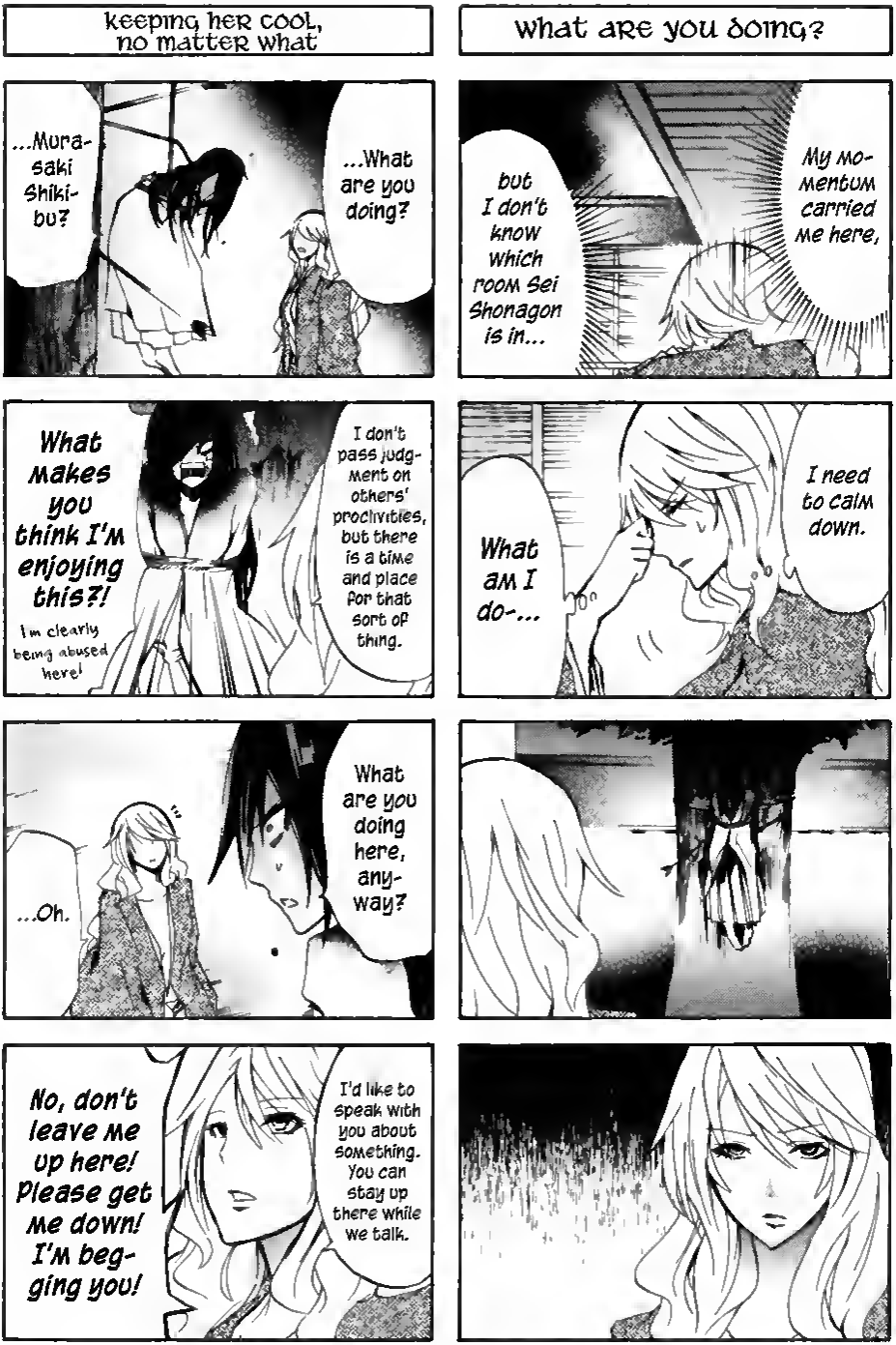
what to do?






Maybe I could have someone close to her ask her about it for me.
Her Majesty
Her Majesty
Her Majesty
Her Majesty
The Empress? But I can't approach her on my own...




keeping her cool, no matter what
...Murasaki Shikibu?
...What are you doing?
What makes you think I'm enjoying this?!
I'm clearly being abused here!
I don't pass judgment on others' proclivities, but there is a time and place for that sort of thing.
...Oh.
What are you doing here, anyway?
No, don't leave me up here! Please get me down! I'M begging you!
I'd like to speak with you about something. You can stay up there while we talk.
what are you doing?
but I don't know which room Sei Shonagon is in...
My momentum carried me here,
What am I do-...
I need to calm down.

Good night

Ben-kan's gone now, so I can go

tmp tmp

I wonder if Shonagon is all right.

help .....

I missed you! I missed you so much!

Kou Shikibu's interpretation.

I should go to bed.

Oh... now I'm seeing things.

that wasn't her hand *

* The original pun is that Murasaki wants to "enter" ("hairu") the main topic of conversation, but instead, Shonagon "enters" her cleavage

Mm-hmm.

Sigh... Very well, then. Please don't move.

I need to get her down so we can move on to the issue at...

saw saw

What am I doing?

hand ...

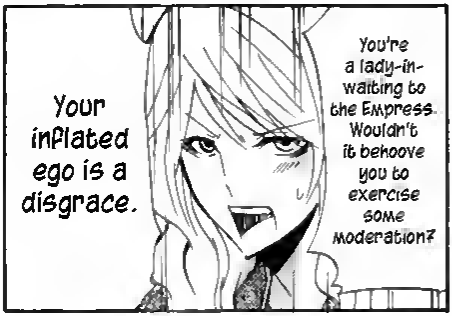
snap

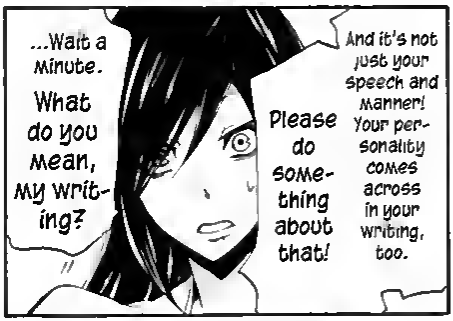
mmph

DO YOU EXPECT ME TO FORGIVE YOU, JUST BECAUSE IT WAS AN ACCIDENT? LOOK WHAT YOU DID TO ME...

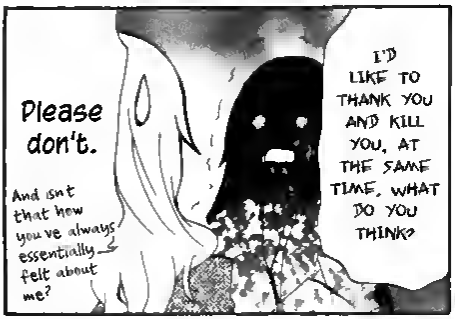
Oh, I'M sorry. It was an accident.

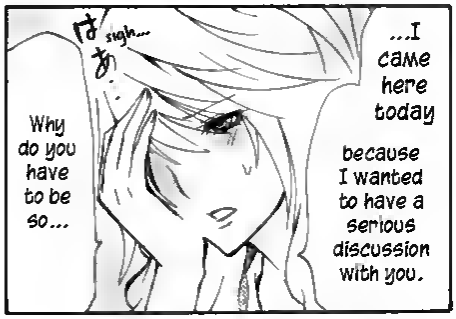
the inner palace network moves at fiber-optic speed


Your inflated ego is a disgrace.
You're a lady-in-waiting to the Empress. Wouldn't it behoove you to exercise some moderation?

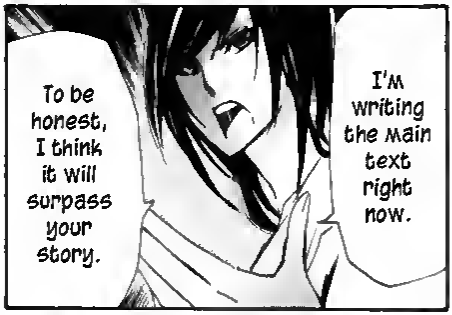

...Wait a minute.
What do you mean, my writing?
Please do something about that!
And it's not just your speech and manner! Your personality comes across in your writing, too.

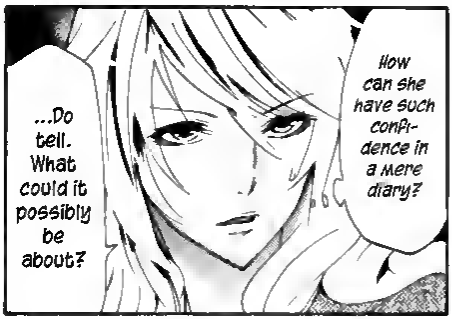
can't keep up


Please don't.
And isn't that how you've always essentially felt about me?
I'D LIKE TO THANK YOU AND KILL YOU, AT THE SAME TIME, WHAT DO YOU THINK?

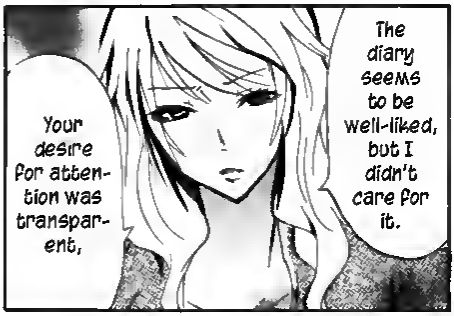


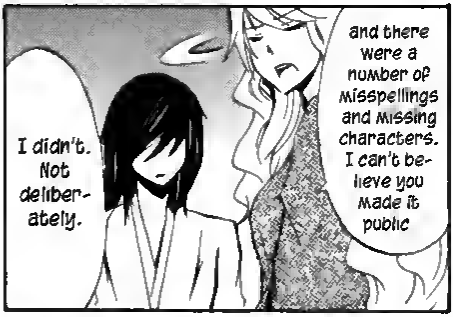
no progress

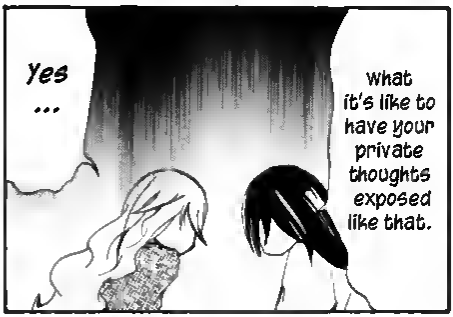




It makes you want to die



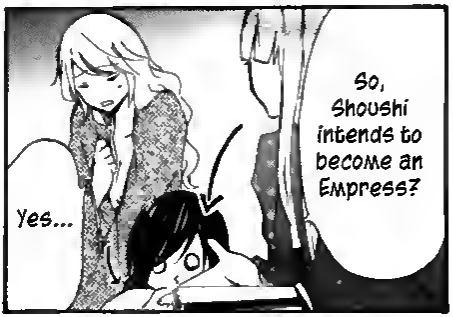

I didn't. Not deliberately.
and there were a number of misspellings and missing characters. I can't believe you made it public



Go on, tell me how you really feel[2]

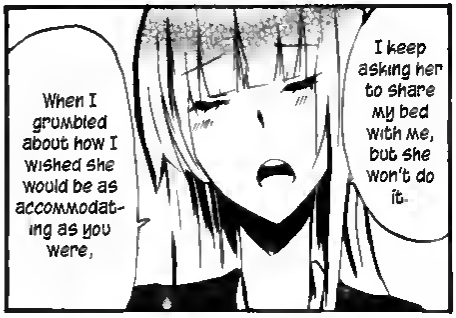
she turns up everywhere
troublesome
For her to up and declare her intent to become an Empress...
Considering Shoushi-sama's usual behavior,
Is it really that serious?
grr
Yes!
Oh, dear.
I'm not sure she even understands what that means.
If the Empress suddenly grew up.
Think about how you would feel
Indeed.
Well, knowing her, I doubt she does.
suddenly... grew up...
What should I do, Shounagon?
I was too small!
I woke up and my kimono
If Her Majesty...
You see now?
pant...
sigh...
I'd be really shaken up too.

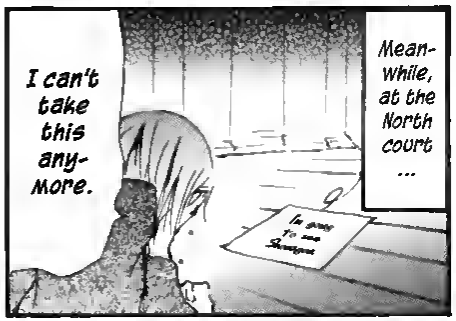
Biting her head off



Should've kept her mouth shut

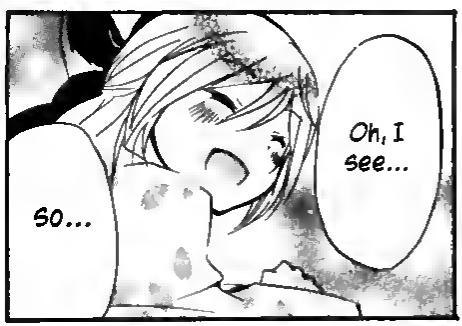
What is someone from the North court doing down here?!
Oh, that reminds me!
I don't know I don't know!
Shonagon, do you know where Benkan is?

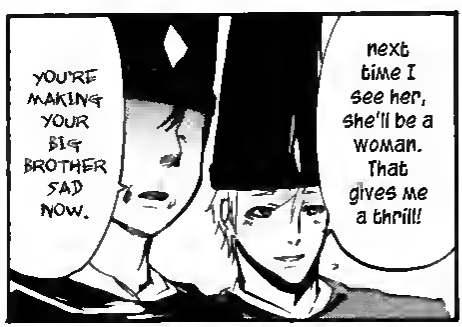

I keep asking her to share my bed with me, but she won't do it.
When I grumbled about how I wished she would be as accommodating as you were,

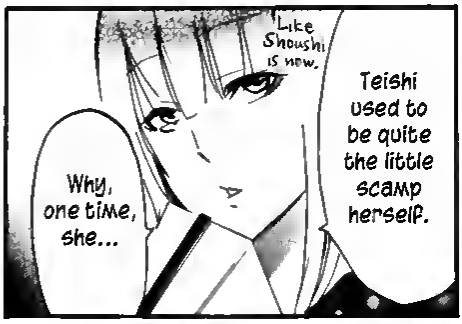


Let us race to that tree!
Okay!

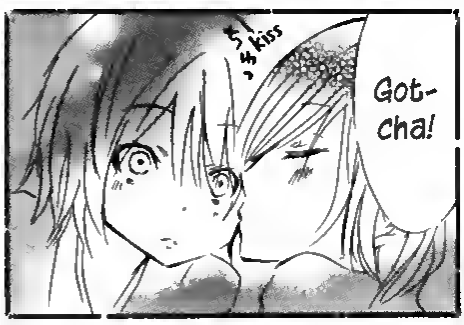
Yes.
Is it true you're sending Teishi to the inner palace?
.....
squeal
squeal

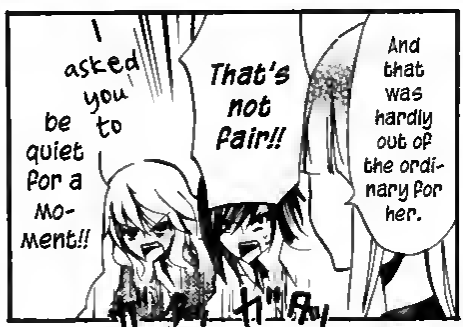

so...
Oh, I see...

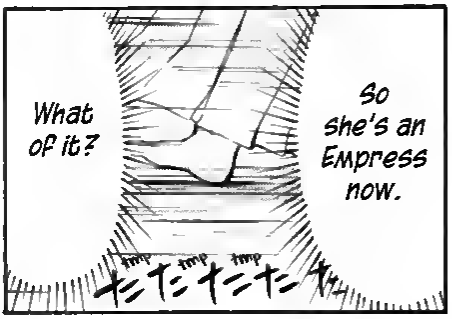

YOU'RE MAKING YOUR BIG BROTHER SAD NOW.
next time I see her, she'll be a woman. That gives me a thrill!

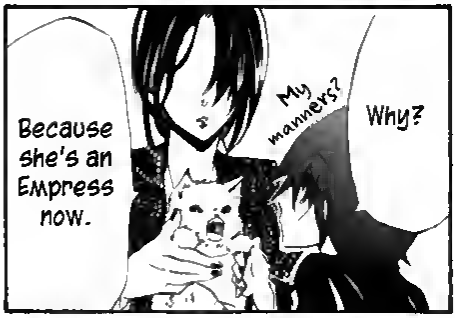

Like Shoushi is now.
Why, one time, she...
Teishi used to be quite the little scamp herself.

?
Hey, Shoushi. Can I tell you a secret?


kiss
Got-cha!


I asked you to be quiet for a mo-ment!!
That's not fair!!
And that was hardly out of the ordi-nary for her.
clatter
clatter

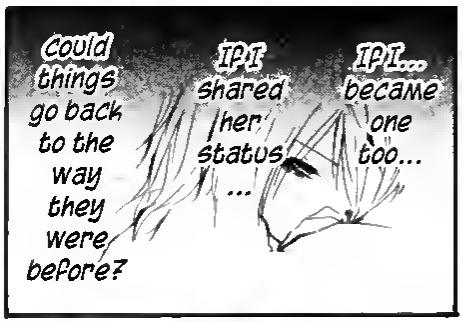


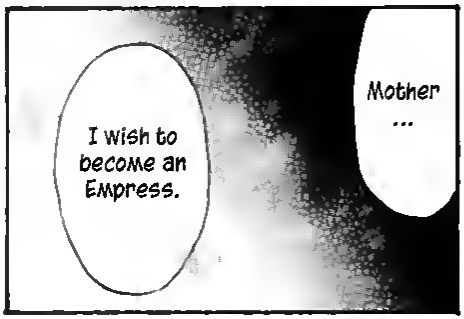


* In the original, Shoushi thinks "chuuguu" sounds like "kiss before bed" ("kiss" ("chuu") plus the sound of being asleep), so she asks if an Empress has to kiss and go to bed

I told you, dear.
Her position is higher than ours now.

You won't be able to play with her like you used to.
...So

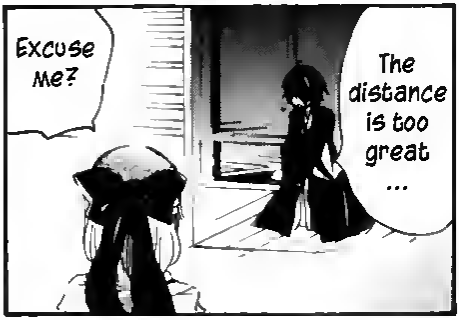

Could things go back to the way they were before?
If I shared her status...
If I... became one too...


Mother...
I wish to become an Empress.

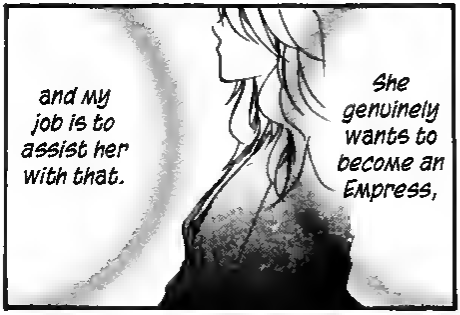
...Are you ill?
...Not at all.

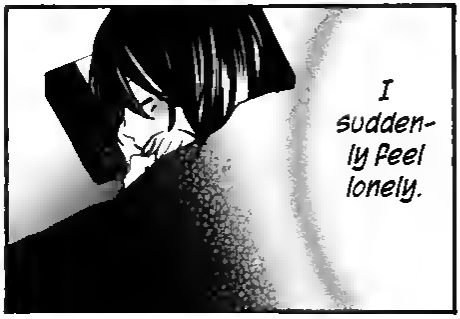
But—
But what?

.....
Won't you come over here?

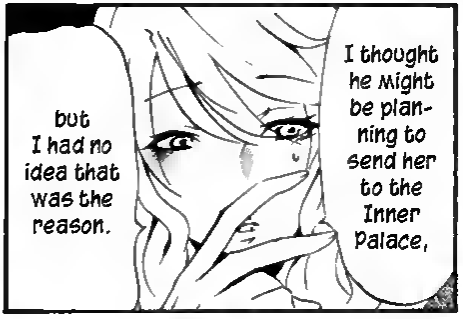

The distance is too great...
Excuse me?

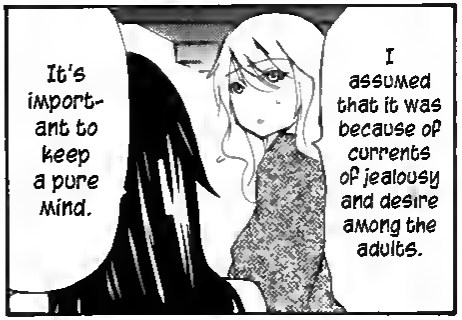
not a relief after all

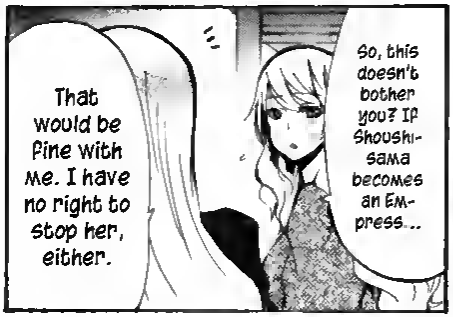




the adult world





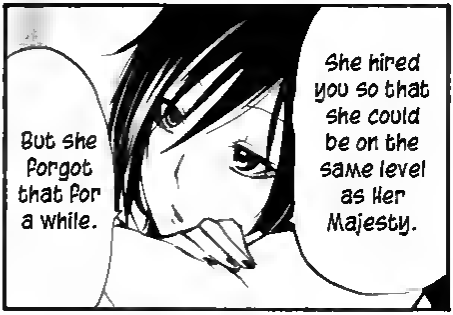

So, this doesn't bother you? If Shoushi-sama becomes an Empress...
That would be fine with me. I have no right to stop her, either.

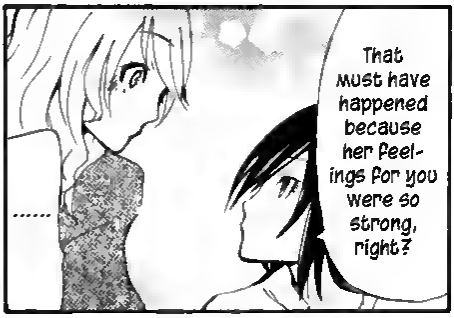
I basically
like everyone.

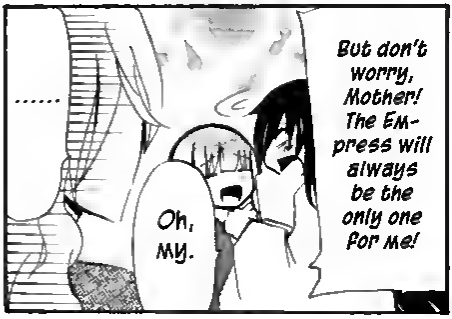
As long as they don't disturb *my peaceful existence*...
...So, that means ...

I like you a lot, too!
?!
This is just how she is.

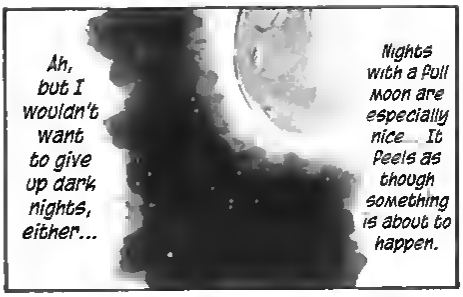
Shoushi-sama must be rather fickle, hmm?
..... Pardon?


She hired you so that she could be on the same level as Her Majesty.
But she forgot that for a while.


That must have happened because her feelings for you were so strong, right?
.....


But don't worry, Mother! The Empress will always be the only one for me!
.....
Oh, my.

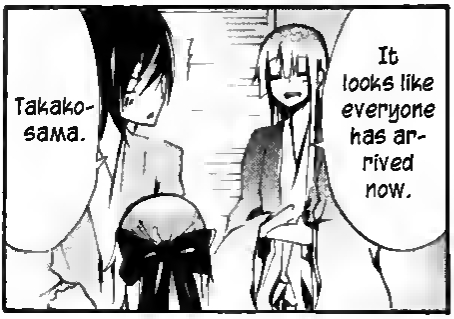
In summer, the night is best!! (・ ∀ ・)


Ah, but I wouldn't want to give up dark nights, either...
Nights with a full moon are especially nice... It feels as though something is about to happen.

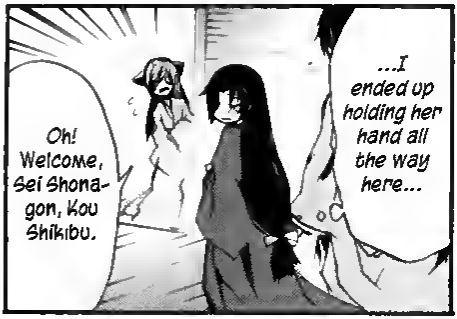
chapter 19

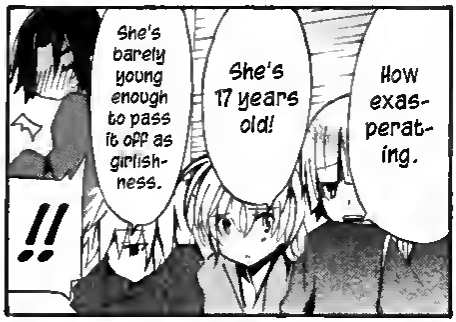
do it
death
Oh... is there?
tug
There's a get-together tonight, remember?
But .....
What is wrong with you?
You need to pull yourself together.
Because all my energy at study groups is focused on Her Majesty...
You never listen to people, do you?
What are you talking about?
just trying to sleep in this heat is an ordeal.
I-I'm not angry about it.
I'm sorry.
You can't go to sleep yet. Not tonight. It's special.
Urk! She is mad! Owww!
squeeeeze
Oh, no! I grabbed her hand... But it would be weird to drop it now. What should I do?
Huh?
...I must decline. I'd be headed straight for heaven if I got any hotter tonight.

turning her brains to mush

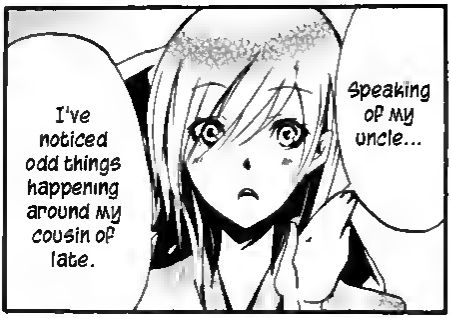


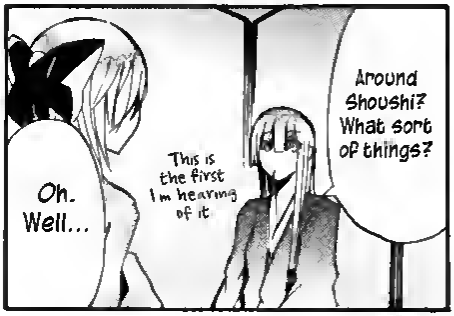
she needs to show some maturity

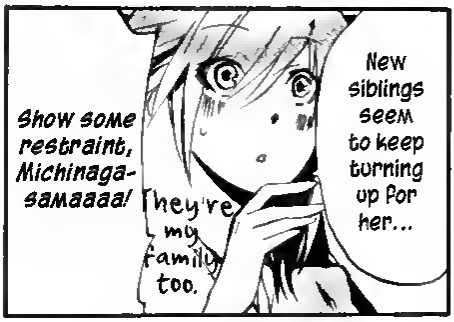


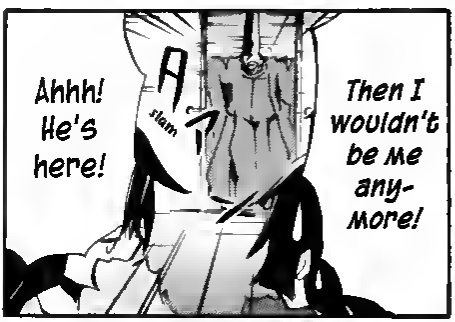


watching your parents flirt
Well, it's also because I want to have some fun.
That was her real motivation, wasn't it?
Excuse me?
I bet even Benkan here would go nuts for it!
crunch
This shaved ice is delicious!
crunch
No...
Nobody will like you if you're a stick in the mud.
Open up, Benkan. Say "ah."
difficult to watch.
...This is kind of
that cooled them off, all right
It's quite hot out today, so I thought it would help us all cool off
What will the reward be?
Ooh!
if I treated everyone to some shaved ice.
O-... oh.
But just eating it would be boring, so I think we should tell some scary stories! That should chill us to the bone!
What?! Yikes!
The boring ones will be exiled!

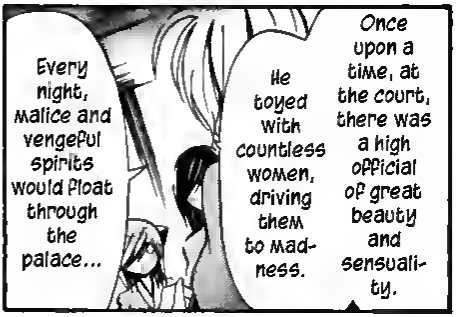

I've noticed odd things happening around my cousin of late.
Speaking of my uncle...


Oh. Well...
This is the first I'm hearing of it
Around Shoushi? What sort of things?

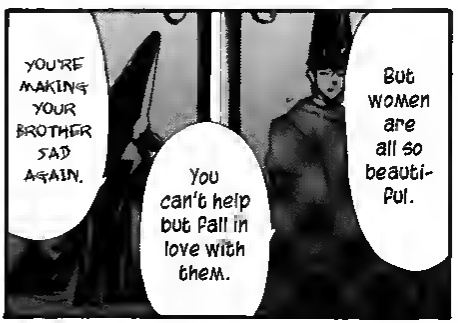

Show some restraint, Michinaga-samaaaa!
They're my family too.
New siblings seem to keep turning up for her...


Ahhh! He's here!
slam
Then I wouldn't be me anymore!

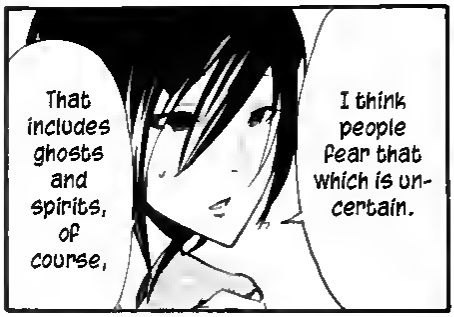
Oh! I will.
Isn't anyone going to volunteer to go first?

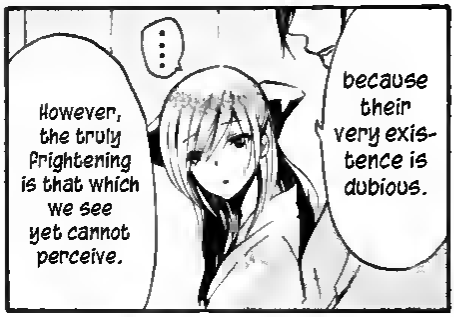

Every night, malice and vengeful spirits would float through the palace...
He toyed with countless women, driving them to madness.
Once upon a time, at the court, there was a high official of great beauty and sensuality.

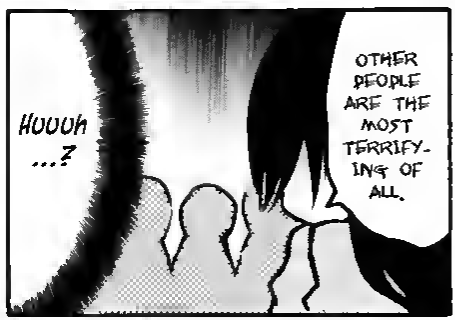
"Once upon a time"? It's happening right now!
Apparently people hear these strange noises every night
Well, I'll just come out and say it—I'm talking about Michinaga-sama.


YOU'RE MAKING YOUR BROTHER SAD AGAIN.
You can't help but fall in love with them.
But women are all so beautiful.

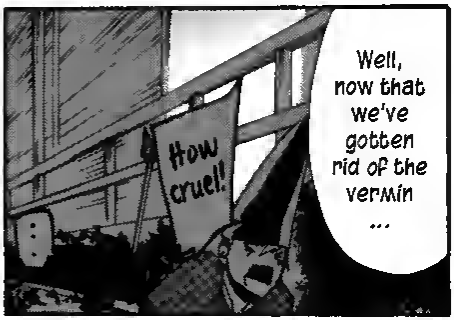
Back to square one

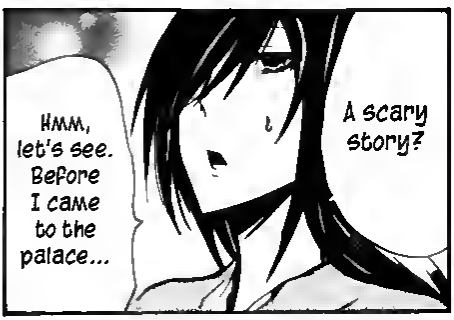






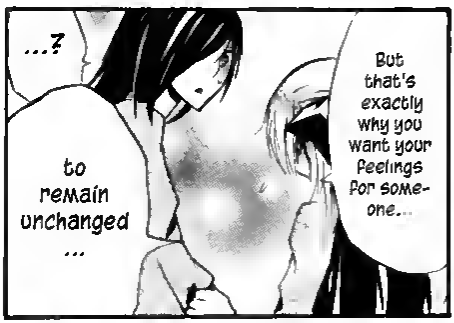
It doesn't have to be like that

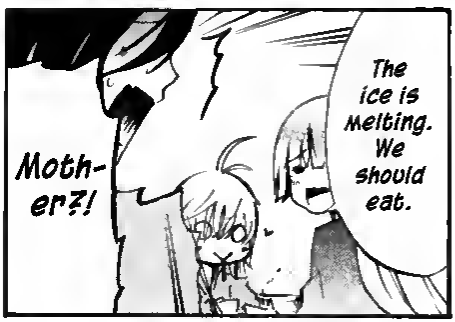




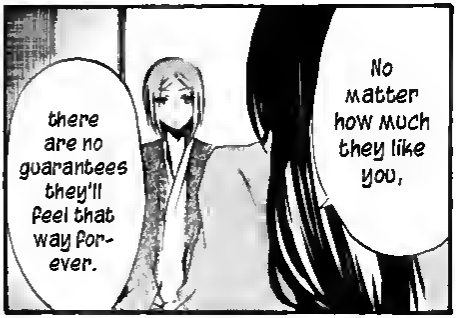
the entire outside world was basically a terrifying place to me.
Where should I start?
A plain old ghost story would be fine.

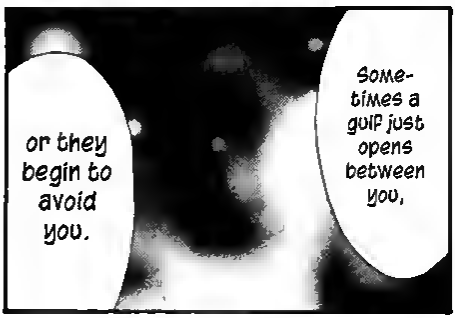
she got bored



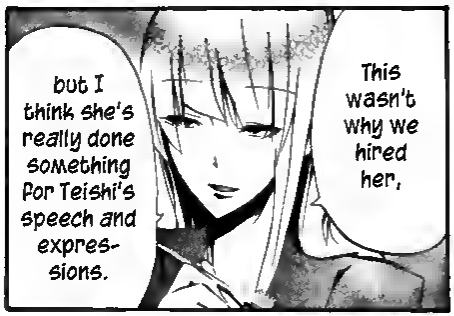


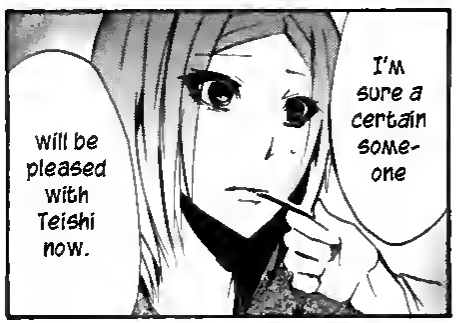
a theory

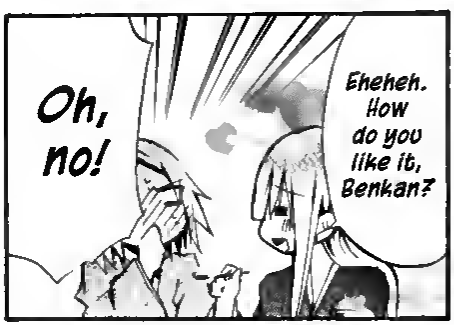




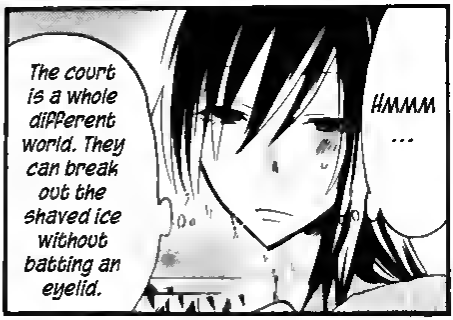
While she was distracted

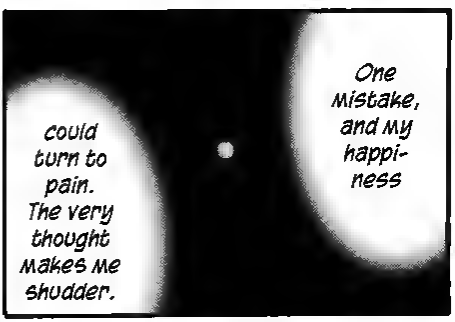


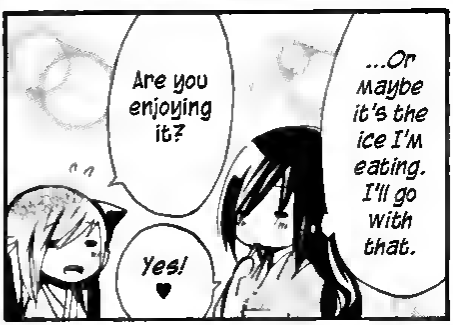




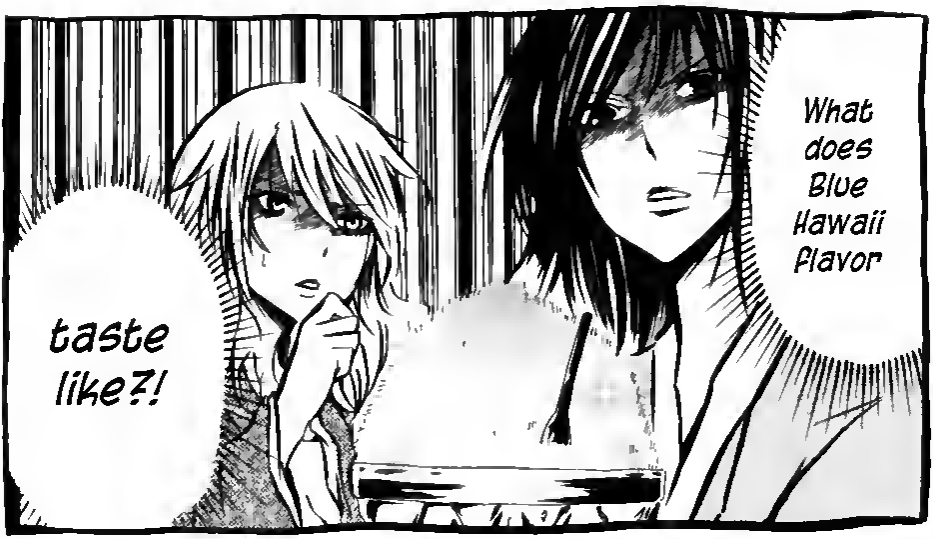
Scary







SUMMER MEMORIES

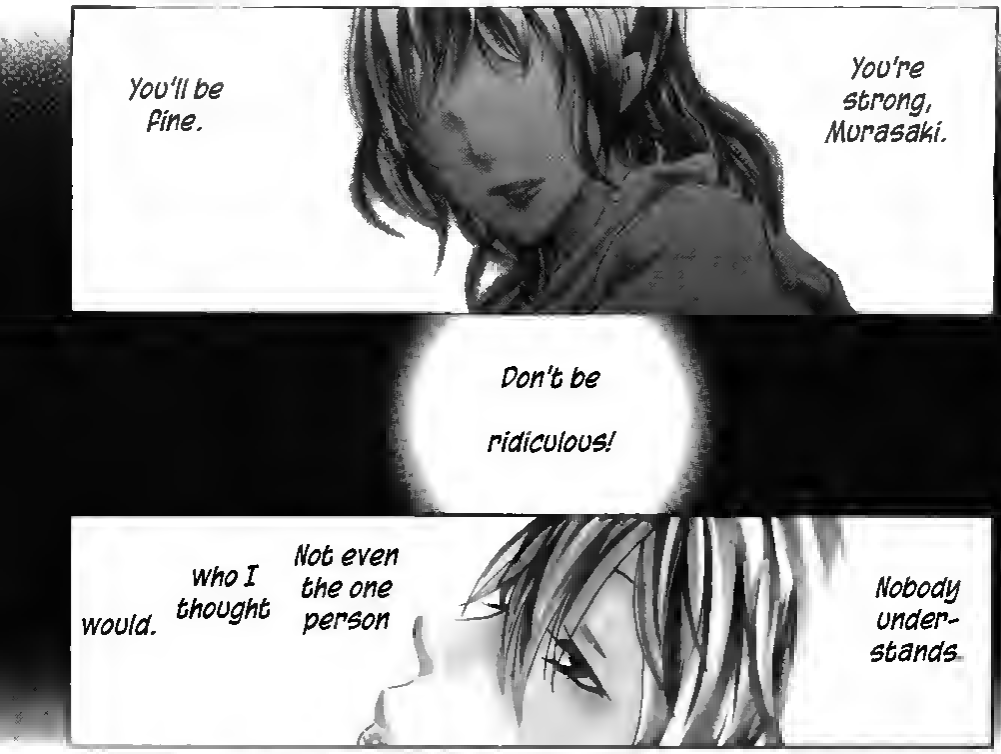


fujiwara no michitaka

I wanted to make him the sort of father who worries a lot, but that also meant he developed a hard-won understanding of the world--second only to Benkan's. You can't help but feel sorry for him, especially seeing how Takako's personality turned out. And yet he's fun to draw, even though he doesn't appear very often.

fujiwara no michinaga

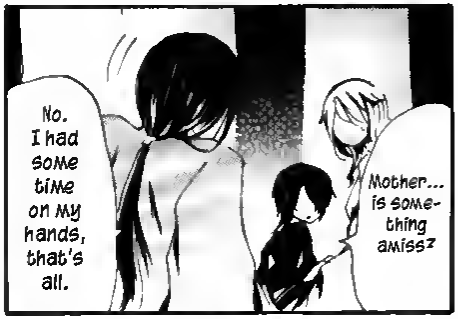
He might be modeled more closely on Hikaru Genji than on the historical Michinaga, but my own prejudices have come into play quite a bit, too.... His stupidity is like Sei Shonagon's, and yet not. So he's fun to draw, even though he doesn't appear very often.

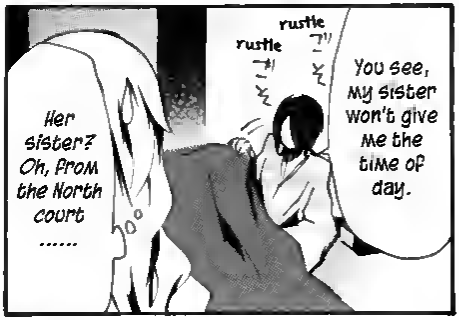

You'll be fine.
You're strong, Murasaki.
Don't be ridiculous!
Nobody understands
Not even the one person
who I thought
would.

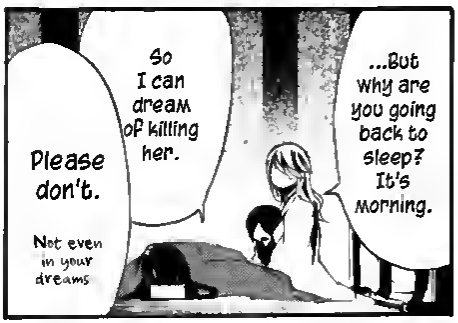
chapter 20
!

Because it's not conducive to her education
Reading too much into it
Be-cause!
grr grr grr
Why would you think that just be-cause I had a dream about someone else?
Be-cause what?!
...What is it, Mura-saki?
fwip
.....
For instance, when I dream about killing that rascal because I yearn to do so in reality!!
Who?!
Dreams are an expres-sion of the uncon-scious mind!
I doubt that. Your face is pale.
Oh, it's nothing.
Shoushi-sama...
...People dream of those they wish to see, do they not?
I had a dream about someone from the past. Someone I miss a bit. That's all.
..... Oh...
Maybe it's time I had a serious conversa-tion with him.
There are too many he wishes to see...
My father says he dreams of a different woman every night.
No.
SHOULD I CONSIDER THAT AN AFFAIR?

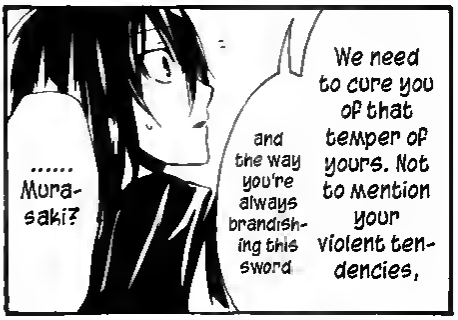
Going back to sleep

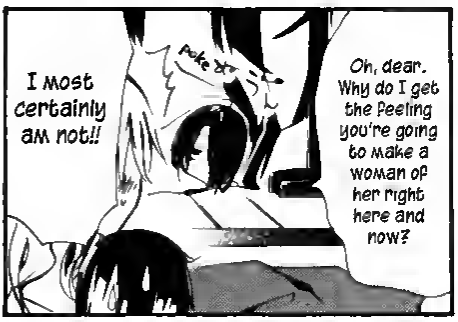




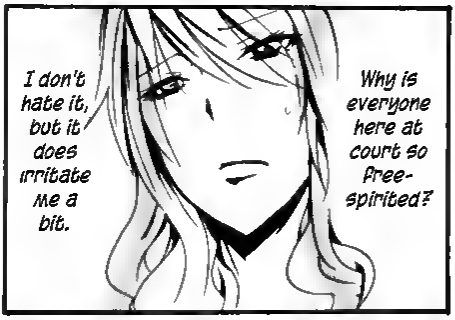


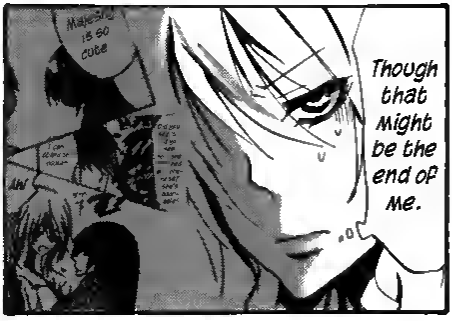
She's not capable of that


..... Murasaki?
and the way you're always brandishing this sword
We need to cure you of that temper of yours. Not to mention your violent tendencies,

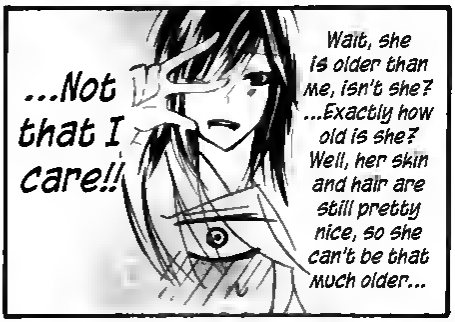


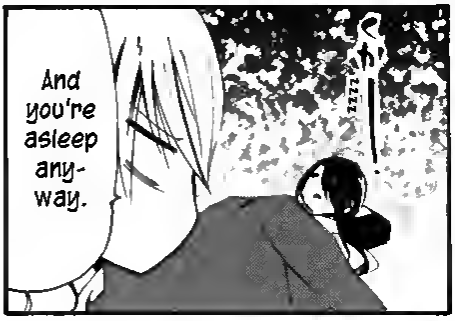
Remembering all sorts of things





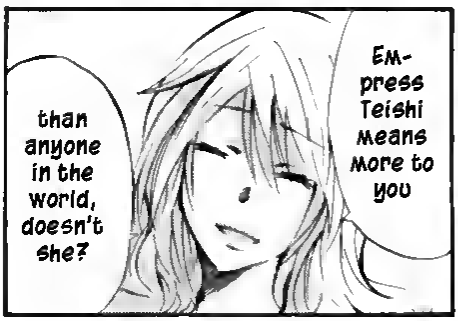
not listening


...Not that I care!!
Wait, she is older than me, isn't she? ...Exactly how old is she? Well, her skin and hair are still pretty nice, so she can't be that much older...

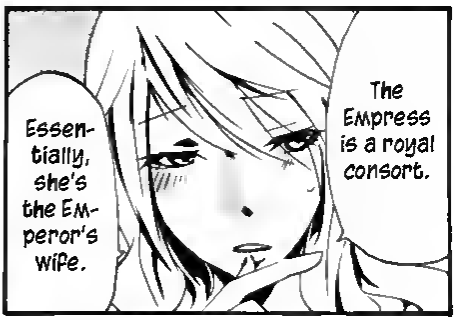


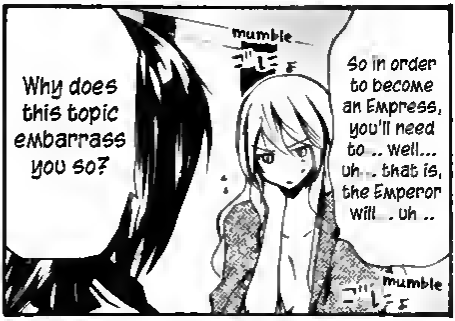
but not just yet
Mura-saki.
Oh! Yes?
gasp
What must I do to become an Empress?
Is learning these materials all that is required?
Uh, that's the bare minimum. You'll also need to do something to distinguish yourself,
so that you might catch the Emperor's eye.
I suppose she still needs me after all.
I should have expected that
What has he to do with it?
dismissed...
Hmm.
munch munch
She hates to study, but she doesn't have a problem understanding the material.
Shoushi-sama is rather clever.
...And then...
If I can manage to teach her some grace, she'll be a match for Empress Teishi in no time.
she won't need me anymore.

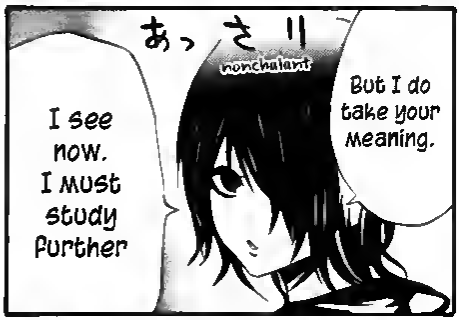
I understand that, but...

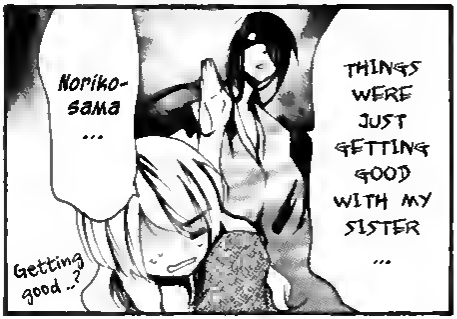


priorities




Why does this topic embarrass you so?
mumble
So in order to become an Empress, you'll need to .. well... uh... that is, the Emperor will . uh ..
mumble

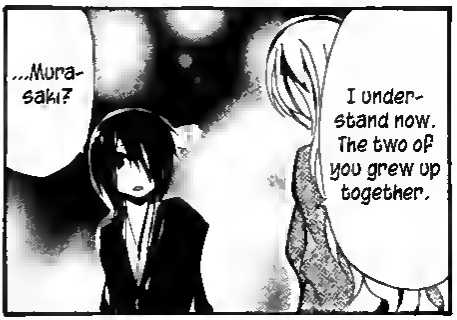


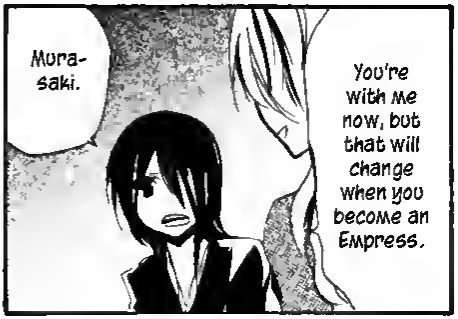

Noriko-sama ...
THINGS WERE JUST GETTING GOOD WITH MY SISTER ...
Getting good ..?

Y-yes...
Honestly! ...Can you study on your own, Shoushi?
Well, then.

HM?
tug
I'M borrowing this one for a bit.

I'M concerned ...
Please keep your hands off my waist, then!
Don't worry, I'll behave.


...Murasaki?
I understand now. The two of you grew up together.


Murasaki.
You're with me now, but that will change when you become an Empress.

Murasaki!
I understand...

chop
!!
Murasakiii !!
You're disturbing my sleep!!

and what's behind them, too
how considerate
Tell me, Mura-saki...
y-yes?
What are your intentions toward my daugh-ter?
Oh, I'm not angry, don't worry.
Why are you so quick to revert to your old self, Mura-saki?
.....
...And here I thought you'd made some progress since the first time.
Why are you groping my breasts?!
I thought it would help you loosen up
Goodness! My fingers really sink in!
Go on. Tell me what lies in your breast.
Like your breasts ...
How can they be so springy?
boing boing
Please get away from my breasts!

That doesn't mean you can solve it all on your own.
...But this is my problem...
If there's something weighing on your mind, spit it out.

Get it all off your chest. You need to settle this.
relive those memories...
But... I'd rath no
We don't want a repeat of what happened before.
And helping you will benefit my daughter, too.
gloom
gloom
gloom

Your

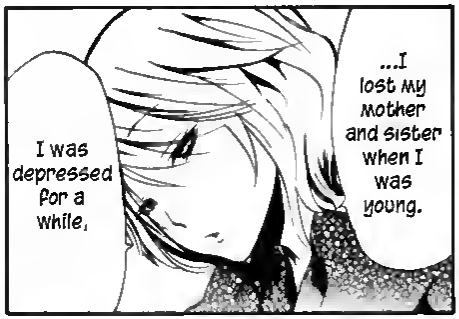
chapter 21

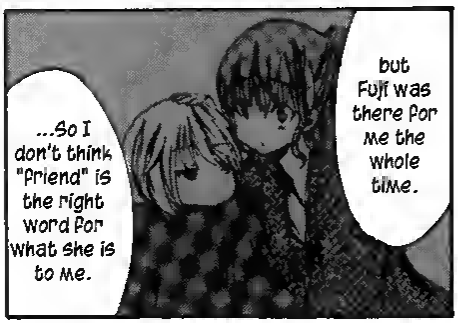
Dark Past...

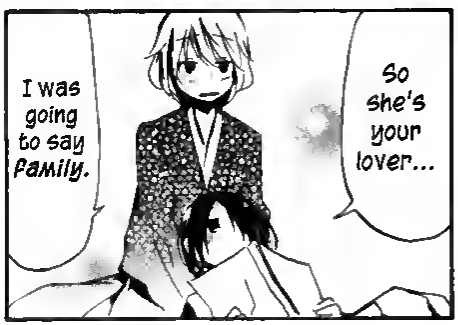
her adolescence
← some flashbacks
I was one of Noriko-sama's ladies-in-waiting.
Several years ago,
#mph.
that there could be ladies-in-waiting here who can't read Chinese poetry.
Forgive me. I was merely surprised to hear
but their glamor was too much for me. And, unfortunately...
I admired the other gentlewomen at court,
Hey, we're not all like you.
Wait, isn't it more normal for a lady to be unable to read Chinese?
Mm...
Don't you ever tire of reading?
You should come talk with us, Murasaki Shikibu.
That's why I hired you.
It's true that not many women have both beauty and culture.
I was a bit ill.
I'd prefer to remain in this world, alone.
You all grew up in the light. It's no wonder our interests aren't compatible.
Don't you worry about that.
...Noriko-sama, why are you lying on my knees?
You're clever, like my sister-in-law...

It was her adolescence
She really is
You're smart. You can do better.
That doesn't bother me.
You're not making yourself any friends here.
Murasaki Shikibu,
I'll be blunt—you're a pain.
You're contrary, huh? Do you really prefer to be alone?
Not particularly.
...Am I?
Don't play dumb! The atmosphere has been terrible ever since you came.
I simply don't wish to have any unnecessary dealings with strangers.
Everyone I care for flees from my life as if possessed...
I know that you're smart, and that Noriko-sama values that,
but every time you show off your intelligence,
.....Are you a medium or something?
No...
...I'm terribly sorry about that.
it inspires Noriko-sama to brag about Takako-sama. We're sick of it.

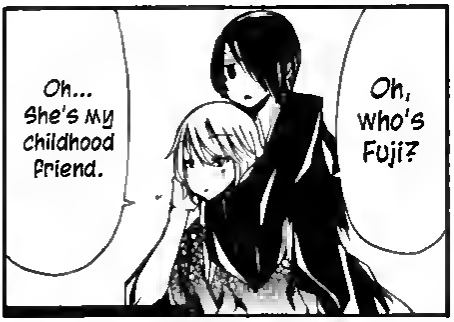
watch what you say

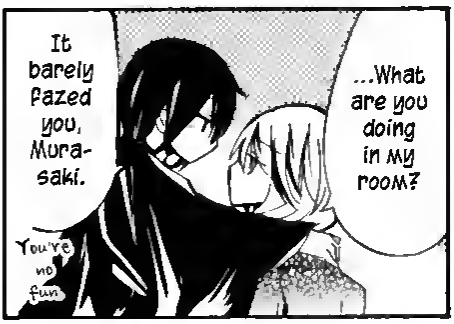




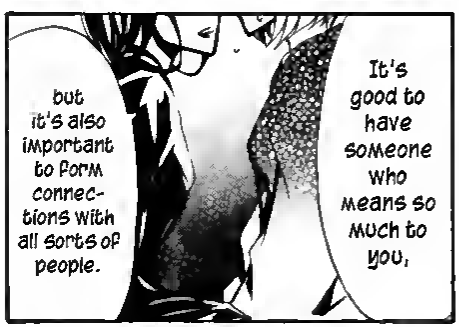


completely expressionless

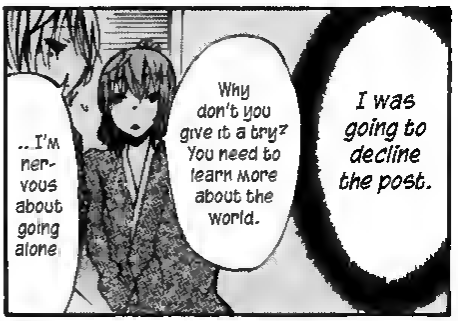


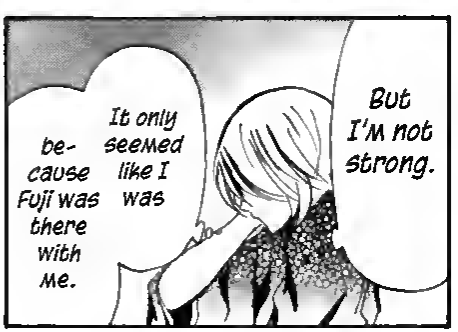


maybe not



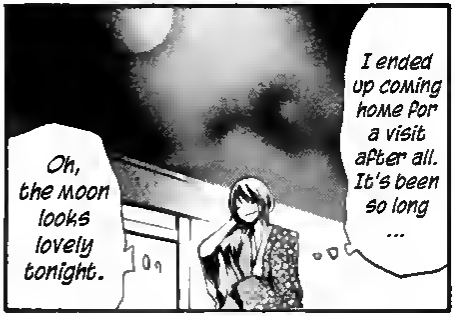
further into the past

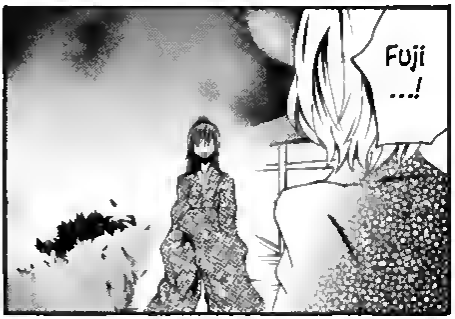

.. I'm nervous about going alone
Why don't you give it a try? You need to learn more about the world.
I was going to decline the post.

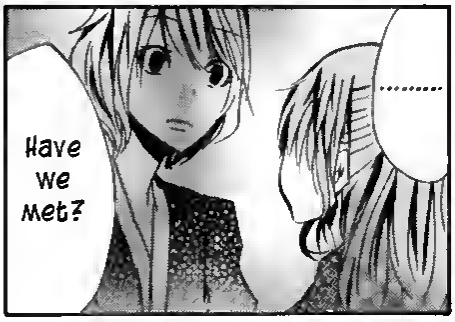


She forgot

Bumping into each other







Behind the clouds
I see her for the first time in ages,
Actually, maybe it really was someone else?
and she's like a different person.
If it was really her.
She left before I could determine
The Moon ..... is hiding now.
I don't really get it, but...
Well, I'd better get going.
Wha— But...
I'll catch you next time. Sorry!
I have some family matters to take care of.
.....
O- Oh...
Pardon me?
Why do I feel like I've been given the brush-off before I even realized I was in love?

[1] This is a real poem by Murasaki Shikibu
The translation here is Sam Hamill's, from *Only Companion: Japanese Poems of Love and Longing*

clouds at midnight blocked the light,

all lost in moonlit shadow.

We met by sheer chance,

but before I could be certain who you really were,

Ah... I wish I could just melt away into the darkness.

.....

Hmph. What a joke.

I know it's not rational,

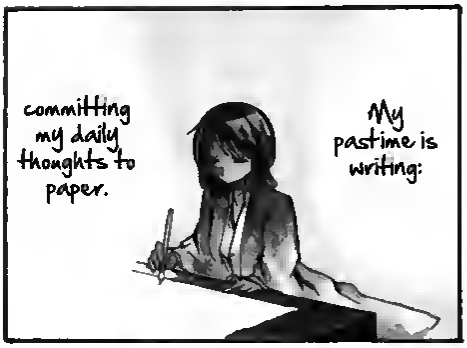
physically or emotionally,

even though she means so much to me.

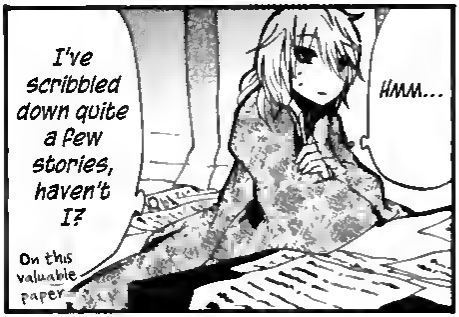
I can't force her to stay with me,

but it still hurts.

murasaki shikibu

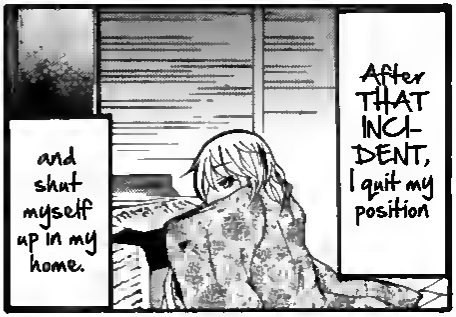


house call



I came to make sure these breasts of yours weren't sagging along with your life-style!
They're fine!!
Wh-what are you doing here, Noriko-sama?

going astray



practically a threat

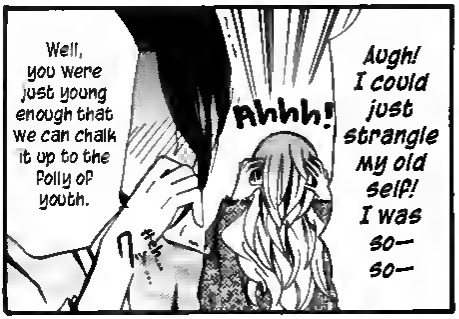
I see. You leave me with no choice, then.
mumble mumble
And I don't deserve to come back after I left my position so irresponsibly...
I'm not worthy to tutor her...
mumble mumble

too late

What are you talking about? You've certainly changed your tune.
I couldn't possibly. I don't even know the first thing about reading Chinese characters. And I'm stupid.

.....So this is... Noriko-sama's...
...I ended up coming back after all.
But...
No... I'm just...
...? Are you crying?
I don't want to move forward
Urgh
I don't think I can do this. I'm bound to run into Noriko-sama's ladies-in-waiting here.
Argh! I just can't! Urgh...
...You're a grown woman.
Was someone cruel to you?
Clever or not,
I can't do anything on my own.
I should just kill myself .....
How weak you are.
!!
Yes, unfortunately.
That person curled up into a ball in the middle of the corridor is Murasaki?

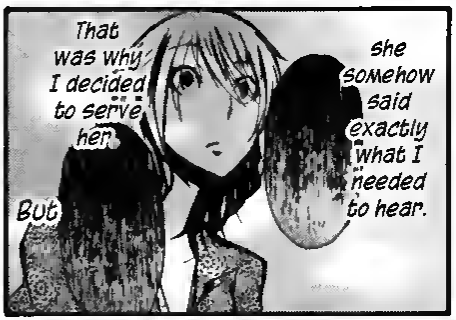
having a breakdown

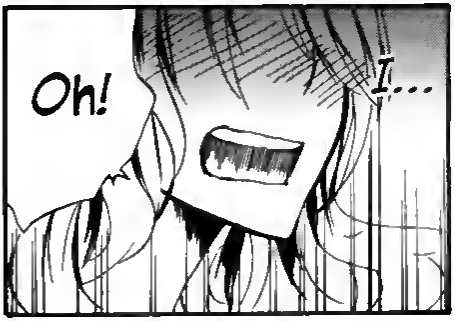

Well, you were just young enough that we can chalk it up to the folly of youth.
Ahhh!
Augh! I could just strangle my old self! I was so— so—

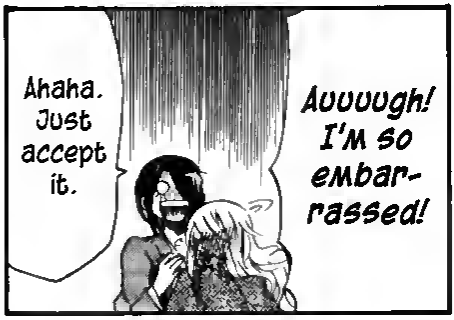
I wonder what really happened?
You jumped to conclusions about what happened with your friend, and got depressed about it.

No! Please burn that!
That poem wasn't bad. I'll write it down here, so people can still read it a thousand years from—
I even wrote a poem about it! Auuugh!

back to the present

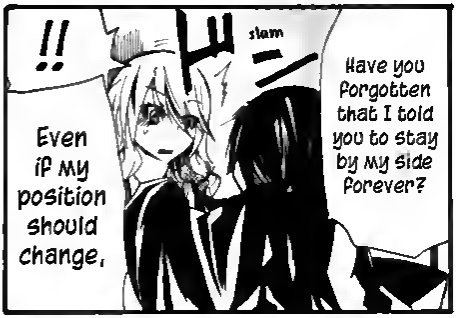






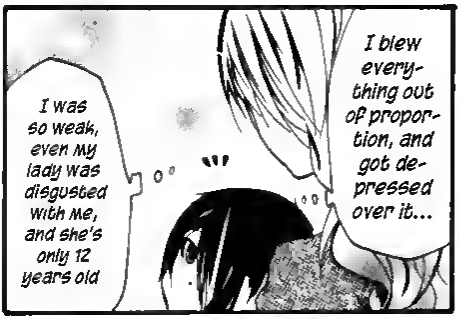
a Ready Reply

Like mother, Like daughter



But... I don't know the first thing about reading people's feelings.
And you, a lady-in-waiting. What a predica-ment.
What a predica-ment indeed.
.....
If you should forget my words and slight me again, your life is forfeit.
Yes, my lady.

GOOD IDEA


I blew everything out of proportion, and got depressed over it...
I was so weak, even my lady was disgusted with me, and she's only 12 years old

GOOD WORK

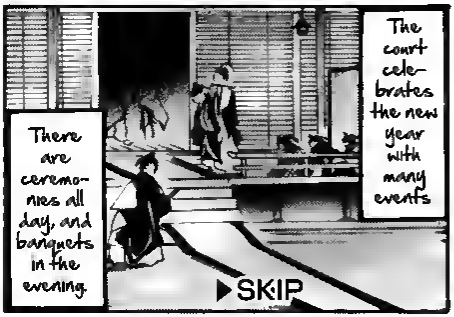
chapter 23

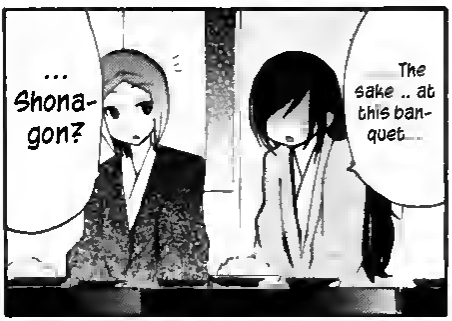
Your Majesty?!

Whose is iiiiiit?

a disaster
this whole chapter will be like this
Quite a situation we have here.
Hmm...
Mmm, delicious sake
flap
flap
...You're pregnant, Your Majesty?
My life is ruined! Waa-aah!
Mura-saki? Mura-sakiiii!
Nooo...
In more than one way...
...Yes, cleaning this up will be quite the task.
Ugh.
Waaaah!
You mustn't let her affect you, Your Majesty.
I wonder what she's dreaming about.

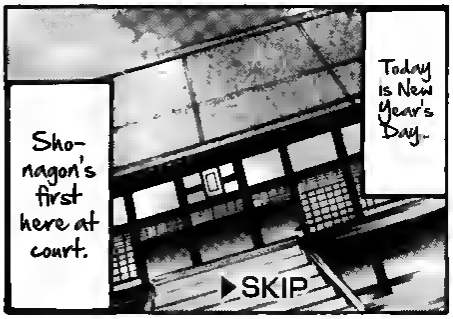
three options

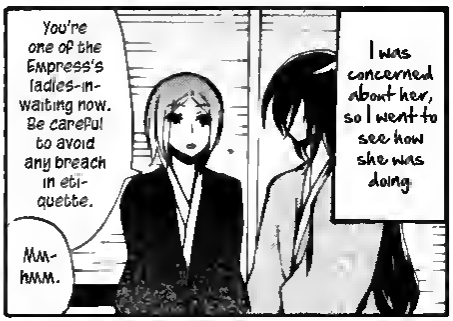




Where are the police?
mutter mutter
It will give me the courage to pursue Her Majesty... Or perhaps I should give her some...
mutter

always terrible

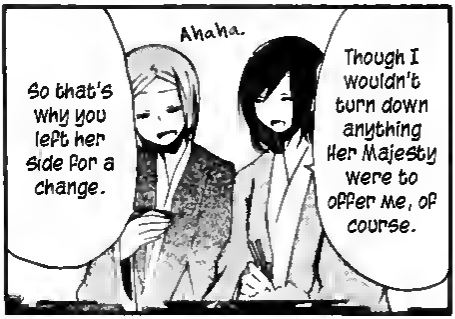


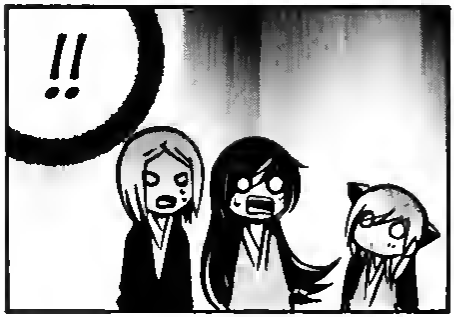

You're one of the Empress's ladies-in-waiting now. Be careful to avoid any breach in etiquette.
Mm-hmm.
I was concerned about her, so I went to see how she was doing

* Shonagon uses the expression "himehajime," which can mean the first sex one has in the new year or a girl's first time having sex. It also contains the word "hime," which is used to refer to Teishi in the manga, so it's a play on words.

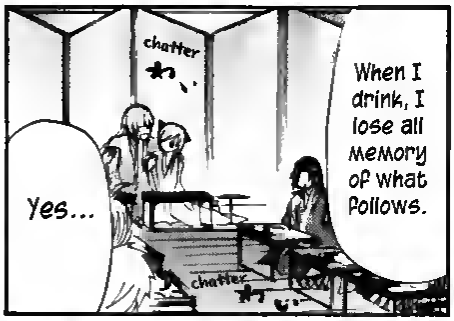
It's inevitable now

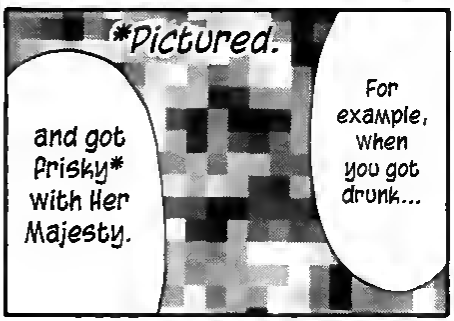
I wish I could drink like everyone else.
Mm, this is good
Then maybe I would like the people that keep offering me sake at banquets.

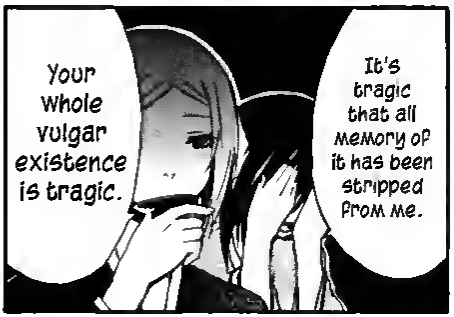

Though I wouldn't turn down anything Her Majesty were to offer me, of course.
Ahaha.
So that's why you left her side for a change.



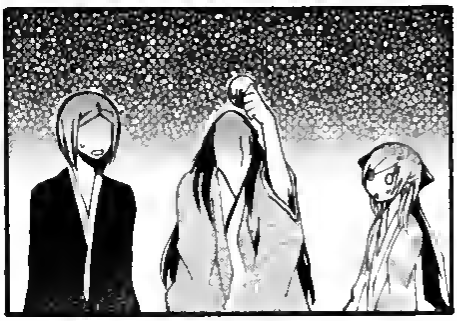
If you don't have a dirty mind, you'll be able to see the third panel

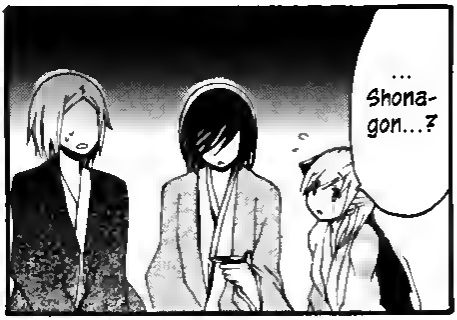






In one brief moment





Impulse

And I don't want Her Majesty to worry about me. I should try and fit in. One drink couldn't hurt...
Urgh. I'll be left out if I'm the only sober one here.

(Benkan is recovering)

her transformation

Here, Shona-gon. Can you drink some water?
Nope!
Benkan, Benkan!
muzzle
muzzle
Stu-... Argh. I told you not to!
Ummmm ... You could just sip it...
You can feed it to me!!
A-are you all right?!
W-we're fine. Sh-she just... ah!
Like this!
crash
can't hold... her... liquor ...
Could someone... get... some water...?
Hmm? Kou Shikibu stopped moving.
Don't worry. She's probably still alive.
Are you sure she's all right?
Oh, my goodness!
Sh-Shona-gon...
Augh! Don't— don't lick my ear!!

you probably saw this coming
She instinctively knows she can't win
You'll thank me when you've come back to your senses!!
It's time I put a stop to this, Shonagon.
So that's what happens when she drinks.
Well, I suppose I don't have much choice, then.
Sh-Shonagon---~~...
dum dum dum dum
Operation: Protect Her Virtue
ぱ
Come here! ♡
You can do whatever you'd like with me!
Cousin!
We've come to pay you a visit!
How can you jump that high?!
Yaaay! Murasaki Shikibuuu!
Why are you running away?!
dash

...Hmm? Sei Shonagon, what is...
no, a brute!
Sei Shonagon is not herself right now. She's a beast...
stagger
Please, flee, Murasaki Shikibu!
IT WAS AN AFTER-IMAGE.
whoosh
To Be Continued
Curse you!
How do you intend to resolve this?!

Don't tell me she's
going for my...
Wha-...
chapter 24
grab!!
!!!
Heh heh.
So sorry. ☆
What the...
Have you been drinking, too?
dreamed

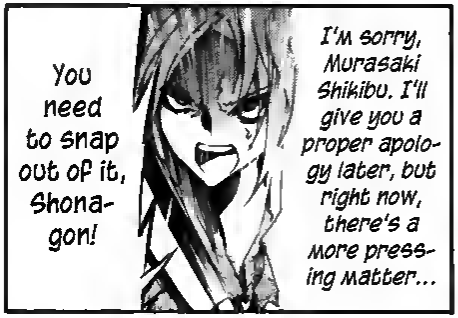
deja vu

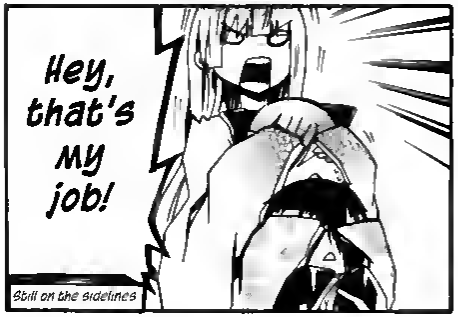
...Huh? You can't get your hands out either...
With this position, you've sealed your own defeat.
How naive.
That's even more naive than my outlook on life.
I don't need to use my hands.
Have you forgotten?
Eek!
amph
もぐ
Cheers!

a mysterious battle

Beheading
(the other gentlewomen were evacuated)
Sort of!
whoosh
Do you think you can get away with whatever you want just because you're drunk?!
GSP
Sei Shonagon...!
Sto-...
Wouldn't that include swinging a sword around inside?!
Well, there are limits to everything!!
You know, I think the value of breasts lies in their admiration.
Mmmmmm. So warm...
Don't try and weasel out of...
Don't talk while your head is in there...
Ah! Stop...
used breasts are just lumps of flesh, Miss.
Yay, yay!
That's enough!

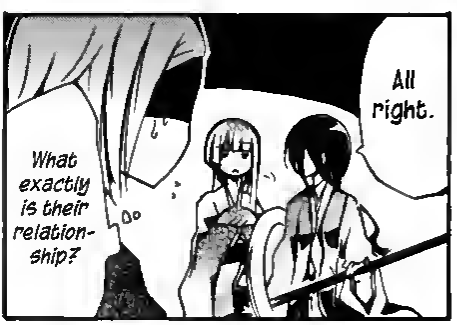
the characters keep changing(´･ω･`)


You need to snap out of it, Shonagon!
I'm sorry, Murasaki Shikibu. I'll give you a proper apology later, but right now, there's a more pressing matter...



making things worse

sisters-in-law

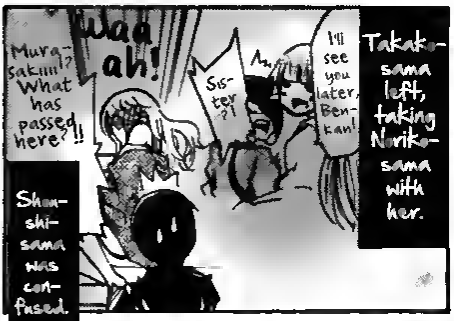


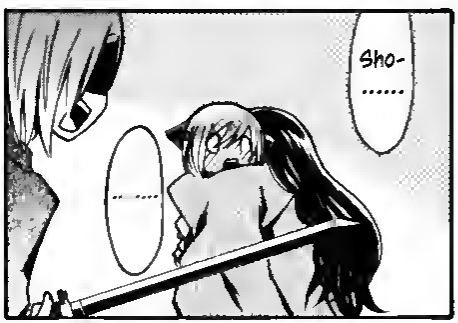
enjoying the show

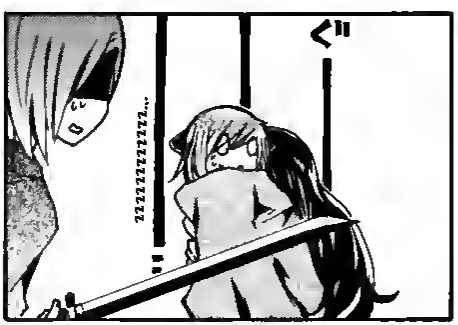
Wha—... Noriko-sama, I think there's been a misunderstanding...
aaah!
MY SISTER WASN'T ENOUGH FOR YOU, BENKAN? YOU HAD TO GO AFTER MURASAKI, TOO?
Eep!

getting back to the second strip of the previous chapter

oops







a certain someone
Gone where?
...Your Majesty, this is a bit belated,
but shouldn't you have gone?
Oh...
Well... to see the Emperor...
I don't think...
I see.
agree to see me at the moment.
he would
Oh, dear
No, Your Majesty! You aren't to blame for this.
I'm sorry. This was my fault.
She brought it on herself. ...In any case, she looks happy. I wouldn't worry. But...
Your Majesty.
She's bright red. Will she be all right?
She is a bit cute... when she sleeps.
How could I think that about someone like her?
gasp
How could I be so bold as to think that about an elder?

It's New Year's Day,
but Teishi
crash
is with Sei Shonagon again, isn't she?
That idiot!
I hate her!

*Woke up.
throb throb
ズキ
*Wants to castigate her, but can't find the words.
*Trying to figure out what she should yell about first.
*Remembers exactly what happened. Can't look her in the eye.
*Legs are asleep because Shonagon was sleeping on her lap.
*Conked out.
...Hmmmm.
So could you sum it up for me?
Oh, you don't remember?
No...
Um... Shirogane, what .....
What in the world did I do?!
pale
brief
Please take responsibility for what you did to everyone. ☆
Good luck.
Though I'd be more than happy to make it up to Her Majesty, if you know what I mean!!

◆fujiwara no noriko◆

she's around 28 in this manga. below takako and benkan, but above shonagon and murasaki. in a number of ways.

I made too many changes to her, too, but let's not worry about that. please don't pay it any mind.

you've seen what she and michinaga are like in this manga. If I get the chance, I'll write about why they got together. someday.

fuji

she's an amalgamation of a number of murasaki shikibu's friends (of a sort), from a variety of documents i read. she's basically an airhead.

when i was creating this character, i did too much research on murasaki shikibu. my heart shifted to her, despite my 10-year loyalty to sei shonagon. i like them both now.

.....what was i talking about, again?

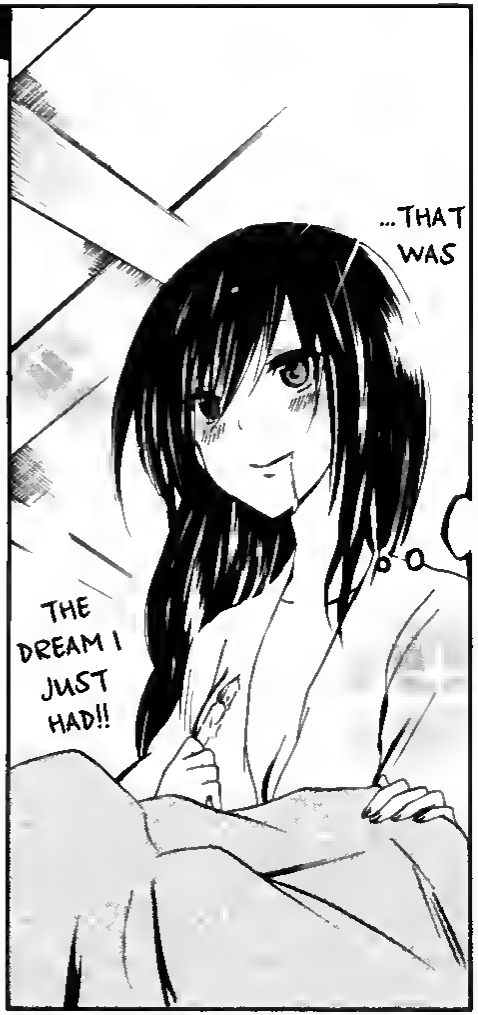
Sorayomi Daichi

AFTERWORD

HELLO, I'M KUZUSHIRO.

WE'VE MADE IT TO THE SECOND VOLUME, BELIEVE IT OR NOT. IT INVOLVED MORE TRIAL AND ERROR THAN VOLUME 1, AND I PLAYED AROUND WITH THINGS MORE... AND LESS... AND WAY TOO MUCH. AS USUAL, THERE ARE A LOT OF IMPERFECTIONS, BUT I'M DOING MY BEST TO IMPROVE, SO PLEASE BEAR WITH ME....

A GAZILLION THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO READ THIS, AND TO SORAYOMI DAICHI-SENSEI FOR THE AMAZING ILLUSTRATION (ON THE PREVIOUS PAGE) THAT HIGHLIGHTS THE REAL FOCUS OF THE STORY.



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◆ *Editing:*
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◆ *Manga:*
Kuzushiro

HOW NAIVE YOU RE ABOUT AS GOOD AT MAKING PREDICTIONS AS THE ARTIST IS AT FOLLOWING THROUGH ON THINGS!!
dum
dum
YOU THINK THERE WILL BE A THIRD VOLUME SINCE THERE WAS A SECOND? HEH HEH...
dum
dum

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